WARHAMMER 40,000

ARKS OF OMEN

# VASHTORR

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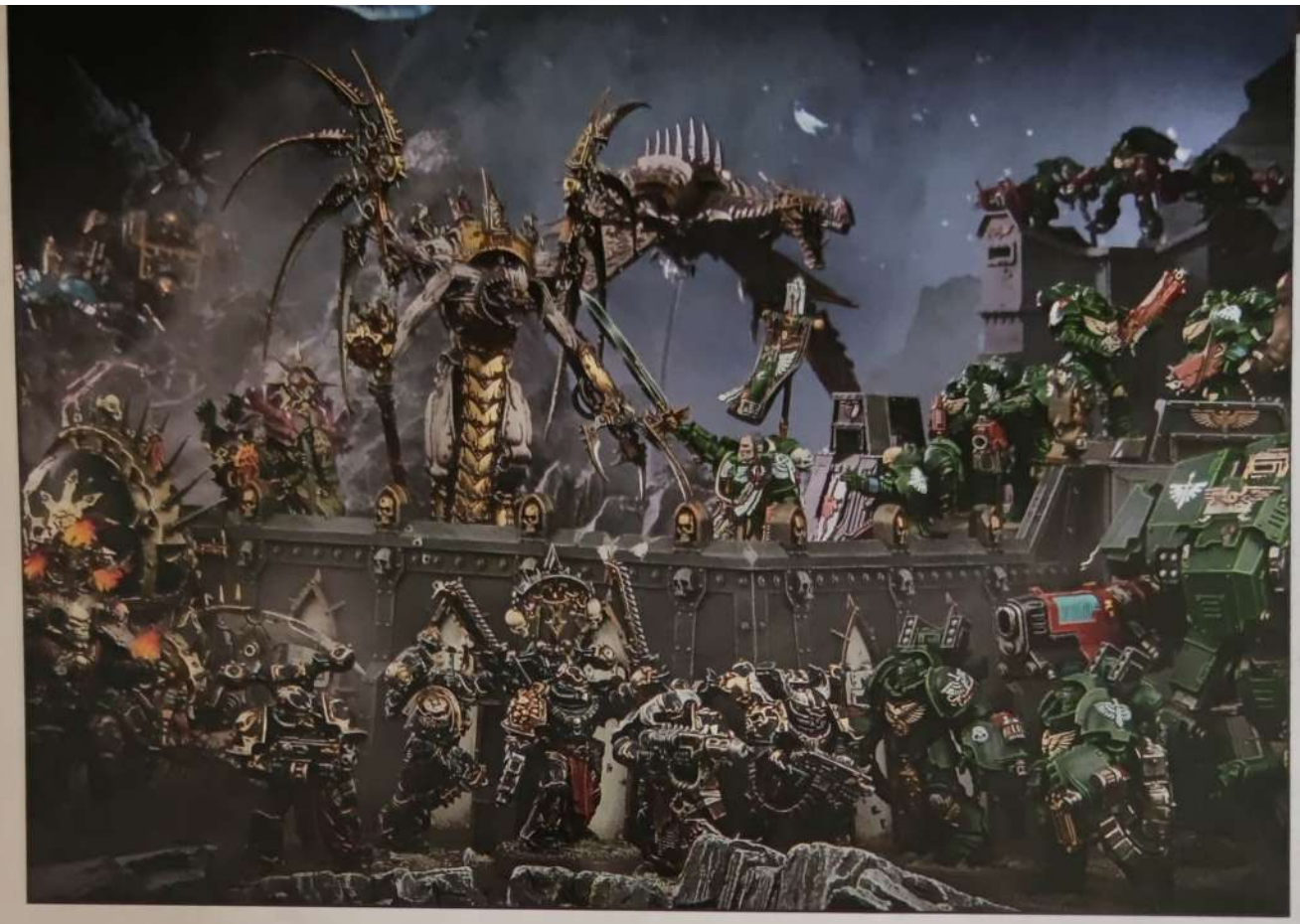


# INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to *Arks of Omen: Vashtorr*, the third book in this ongoing narrative series. Continuing the story in the wake of the events of the first two Arks of Omen books, this next war-torn tome sees fresh conflicts erupt as Vashtorr the Arkifane takes his next steps in the galaxy-shaking plans of conquest he has formulated with Abaddon the Despoiler.**

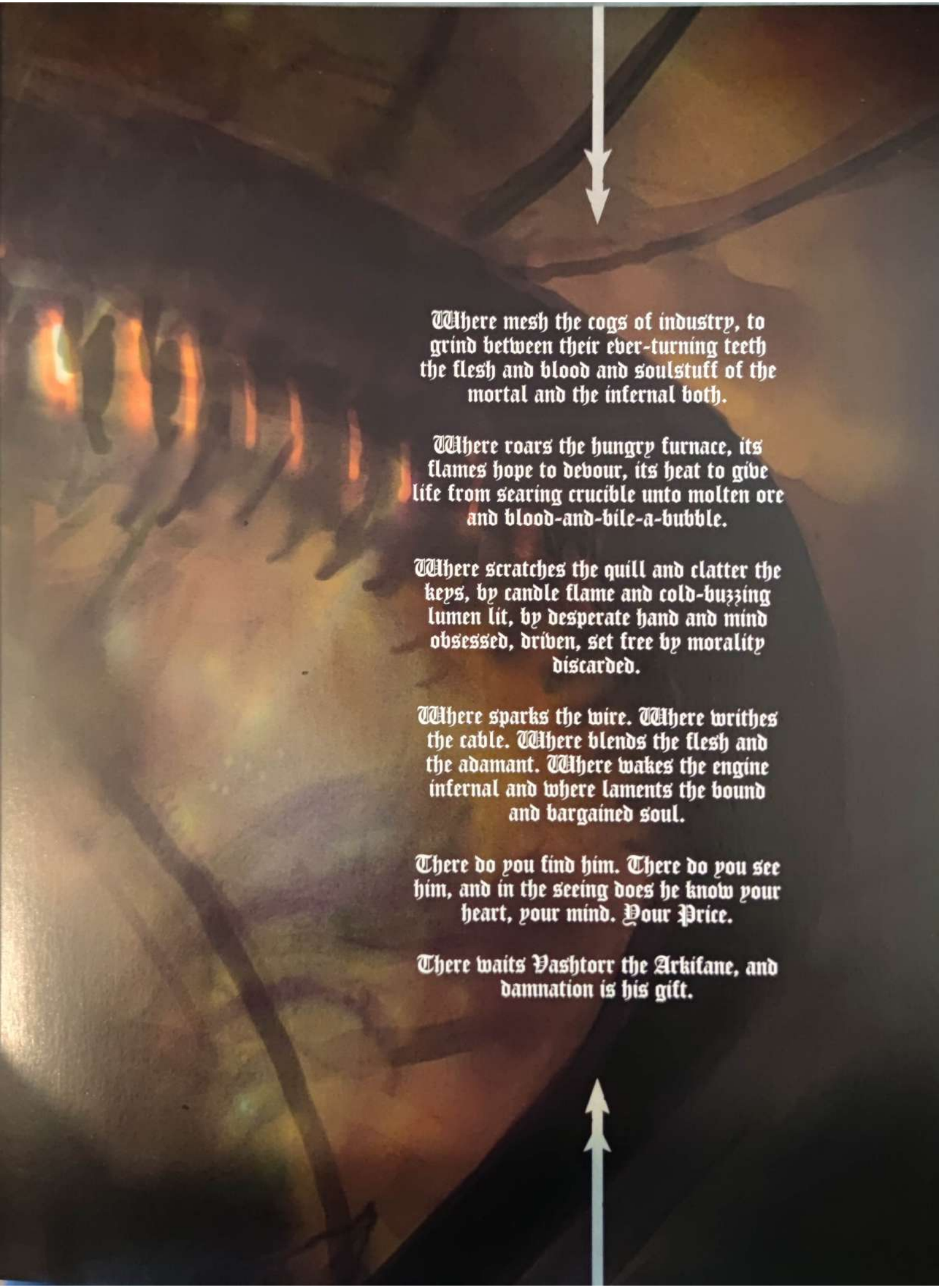
War raged amidst the stars. The cruel laughter of the Dark Gods echoed through the void. Sundered by the Great Rift and tormented by bloody conflicts beyond count, the galaxy writhed in pain. Mutual annihilation threatened, but Abaddon the Despoiler –Warmaster of the Imperium Nihilus – would not suffer his Long War to end in such mindless nihilism.

Instead, he began a quest to find some final weapon or prophetic insight of such fateful power that it would decisively turn the galactic conflict in his favour. The answer was seemingly brought to him by Vashtorr the Arkifane, daemonic master of the soul forges. Working in uneasy alliance, the daemon and the Warmaster poured their combined resources into fashioning titanic mutant warships from captured space hulks. These were the Arks of Omen.

Augmented with Vashtorr's gifts and accompanied by Balefleets of heretic warships, the Arks struck all across the galaxy. Though they spread misery and ruin seemingly at random, their true task was to claim warp-imbued artefacts. These, Vashtorr claimed to be able to meld into a terrifying device he called simply the Key. He claimed that this Key would open the way to a weapon that would grant Abaddon victory in realspace and elevate Vashtorr to the status of a true Chaos God.

As the onslaught of the Arks of Omen ground on, especially savage conflicts erupted around the most vital Key-fragments. Amidst these apocalyptic campaigns, demigods bestrode the stars and ancient fiends emerged from the shadows of legend to spread terror anew. Most spectacular of all was the Battle of Malak, fought within the unseen spiritual radiance of the device known as the Choral Engine.

Though this pre-Imperial machine had allowed Indomitus Crusade Fleet Quartus to accelerate their conquests amidst the stars, it also proved their downfall. No less a monster than Angron, Daemon Primarch of the World Eaters Legion, was drawn to its radiance at the head of the largest traitor fleet seen since the height of the Gothic War. In the roiling system-wide battle that followed, the Choral Engine and the planet Malakbael were destroyed in a supernatural cataclysm that hurled Khorne's murder-curse out across the stars and also exposed the Key-fragment hidden at Malakbael's heart. Amidst the devastation, Vashtorr himself manifested to claim this true prize.
The Arkifane's plans were advancing, but there were vital elements yet to slot into place…



Where mesh the cogs of industry, to grind between their ever-turning teeth the flesh and blood and soulstuff of the mortal and the infernal both.

Where roars the hungry furnace, its flames hope to devour, its heat to give life from searing crucible unto molten ore and blood-and-bile-a-bubble.

Where scratches the quill and clatter the keys, by candle flame and cold-buzzing lumen lit, by desperate hand and mind obsessed, driven, set free by morality discarded.

Where sparks the wire. Where writhes the cable. Where blends the flesh and the adamant. Where wakes the engine infernal and where laments the bound and bargained soul.

There do you find him. There do you see him, and in the seeing does he know your heart, your mind. Your Price.

There waits Vashtorr the Arkifane, and damnation is his gift.

*On those occasions when Vashtorr the Arkifane manifested in realspace he was forced – as are all daemons – to confine his essence within a corporeal shell.* Though a demigod of his kind, and possessed of the ability to reshape reality through cunning and force, still he felt as constrained at such times as would be a mortal daring the void in a pressure suit.

All was different within the warp. In the metaphysical realm of infernal industry known as the soul forges, Vashtorr was free to exist as his true self. He was a gestalt realisation of innovation without conscience, a churning mass of invention and obsessive artifice. Here he was a timeless thing, an ever-revising quantum schematic of unfettered leaps of logic. The merest glimpse of his true aspect would have driven all but the most supremely intelligent mortals instantly mad.

Vashtorr's sanctum lay at the conceptual heart of the soul forges. It was a place of endlessly spiralling pipes and cables, hungry churning gears and gales of sulphurous steam. The entire impossible edifice twisted and realigned constantly under the influence of a galaxy's worth of conceptual mortal imaginings. It was guarded by entities embodying the boundless malice of the cruellest mortal intellects, and the raw power for annihilation those minds imbued into their most diabolical technologies.

Deep within the ghastly machine, Vashtorr brooded in a place of drifting smog and flickering neurological lightning. Each theory and concept that crackled through his consciousness struck like hammer on anvil to send immaterial sparks dancing. Amidst the motes Vashtorr discerned visions of events transpiring across the span of realspace.

The Arkifane had embedded his imps through the societal fabric of countless galactic civilisations. Wherever sentient minds employed imagination the imps found purchase in superstition, becoming gremlets, ill-o'-wills, wyredjinn, cakosparks and innumerable other spirits of sabotage and mechanical malice. Anchored thus in the fabric of reality, Vashtorr's imps showed him much.

He sought for Arks of Omen and their Balefleets. He watched the *Netherworld Blade* cut through the gloom of the Chalnath Expanse. Daemonic techno-possessors had been joined by Warpsmiths, Masters of Possession, Daemon Engines, Obliterator Cults and countless other technologically corrupted renegade factions. Their Balefleet grew and spread.

He saw the *Chaoticus*, the *Hound of the Void* and the *Seed of Doubt* assailing forge worlds and the holdings of their Knightly allies. They struck here and there across the Imperium Nihilus. Vashtorr was unsurprised to see that, of the three Arks, only the *Hound of the Void* had held to its mission and recovered its Key-fragment.

The *Infernal Threnody* flitted through the empyric sparks before him and Vashtorr saw it deep within the Galactic Core, being ruthlessly picked apart by the Kin of the Kronus Hegemony for trespassing in their territories. The *Sobbing God*, by comparison, had somehow escaped the peril that had almost engulfed it. Scourgemaster Ulghata had prised his renegades and sorely-damaged Ark from the hungry jaws of Hive Fleet Kraken. Despite still being heavily infested with warrior bioforms, the *Sobbing God* was now engaged in raids upon the worlds of the Felgoth Nebula and spreading both Chaos corruption and Tyranid invasion wherever it went. Vashtorr was intrigued as to what cunning innovations had allowed Ulghata to effect his escape. He tore his regard away, regretfully reminding himself to focus on greater matters.

Here, the *Perfidium* and it's Emperor's Children masters, gripped by their obsession to claim not only their own Key-fragment but as many more as they could recover. There the *Sacrogheist*, dark, drifting lifeless. Traces of withered plant life were dotted here and there about its corridors amidst the hewn and blasted dead.

Vashtorr reflected that the longer such a hugely complex galactic mechanism ran, the greater were the chances of unexpected complications arising and other parties intruding upon its operation. Had the Blood God planned the interruption of the Battle of Malak or merely seized upon it in wrath? Vashtorr suspected rather the Changer of the Ways' hand in that cataclysm, his pawns sacrificed upon the altar of expediency. Neither possibility surprised Vashtorr, but both concerned him. He didn't doubt that the servants of the Dark Gods would be compelled to acts of sabotage in the name of the Great Game.

And then, of course, there was the Dreamer, the Exile King. He, of any, would have cause to despise Vashtorr's artifice if he learned the truth. He roamed further afield by the day and no longer fought alone. He left broken cogs in his wake, the *Sacrogheist* only the most recent amongst them.

The Arkifane had concluded that matters required acceleration. It irked him to rush and to simplify the elegant workings of grand mechanisms, particularly those most central to his grandest inventions. Yet it was better, he pragmatically reflected, to drive a device to breaking point and thus have it achieve its purpose than to allow it to stagnate and falter for the sake of caution or ego.

As the demigod of every scientist who injected an agent or practised a theorem before it was ethically safe, every engineer who ever cast aside regulations in the name of liberated intellect, it was well within Vashtorr's nature to improvise thus. A span of time had passed since the events of Malakbael, at least as mortals perceived it with their limited senses. Now it was time for Vashtorr to dirty himself with the confining touch of realspace again.

He knew which matter most demanded his attention. Already he had consulted with the Warmaster, for appearances' sake if nothing more. What Vashtorr did not know, yet, was the location of his target.

There was a reason the Arkifane tinkered always with so many mortal devotees and devices. One amongst his countless cogs in realspace had clicked perfectly into alignment and generated the solution to his quandary. Vashtorr had only to step forth and claim the offered output. A brief moment's contemplation showed him which of his parallel schemes could be enhanced by forging connections with this one. Focusing on individual dancing sparks, the Arkifane triggered waking dreams and manifested data-omens to activate mortal servants and allies. He was soon satisfied that all would fulfil their designated functions.

One by one the metaphysical cogs turned at Vashtorr's bidding. Within the limited temporal flow of realspace events occurred in linear fashion over centuries, cause and effect manifesting with each mortal decision, action and choice. Beings discovered his worship, by accident or design, dedicating entire lifetimes and all their imagination and artifice to his plans. Technologies were created, underwent catastrophic failures, or mutated in line with Vashtorr's whims, each time advancing his designs with clockwork precision. Renegade warlords offered him their devotion or struck bargains with his proxies. They undertook star-spanning quests without ever knowing they were but cogs in one of the Arkifane's innumerable devices.

In Vashtorr's perception, all this transpired with instant synchronicity. The clockwork of carefully aligned realities meshed and churned, growing in complexity until it filled his shadowy sanctum and fused in turn with the cogs of his own warpstuff. The essence of Vashtorr crafted itself into the fractal complexities of his latest realspace engine, aligning corporeal frequencies until it achieved a singularity of warp translation. The veil of reality shredded before him, and Vashtorr the Arkifane stepped into a dancing storm of lightning.

Corporeally manifest, Vashtorr stood with hammer in hand upon a glowing dais at the heart of a teleportarium shrine. He permitted himself a moment to align his senses and absorb the scene around him. A robed figure lay prostrate before the dais, augmetic arms and tendrils spread wide. Several other, less heavily augmented figures knelt beside what Vashtorr assessed as warding shrines. Each device bore signs of fresh sabotage to break their supernatural power. Vashtorr sensed the layout of the facility sprawling out around him, its pressure vessel nature and the hard cold of the void beyond its fragile metal skin. Just as intended, he knew that he now stood within the heart of a highly classified deep-void research and monitoring station shared by a coven of the superstitious Martian tech-shamans and the entitled meddlers Humanity called Inquisitors.

The acolytes blared vox-amplified binharic prayers. They competed with the howl of warning klaxons. Vashtorr understood every machine language in the history of the galaxy; the crude cyber-patois of the Adeptus Mechanicus was no mystery to him. The Arkifane could not resist a chuckle as the acolytes heaped praise upon him as an avatar of the Omnissiah. He slammed his hammer against the dais and infernal energies coursed through the chamber. The luckless adepts' prayers turned to screams as mutant circuitry erupted from their augmetics and burrowed through their bodies, melding, twisting and tearing them into fleshmetal spawn.

Another strike of Vashtorr's hammer upon the dais and the arcing energies changed hue. He sensed a distant energy signature align, questing tendrils of empyric power interlocking to form a temporary corridor through which a fearless band of post-human mortals stepped.

Vashtorr stood aside as a squad of Space Marines clad in the black and silver of the Deathwatch materialised on the dais. Their shoulder guards bore an array of proud loyalist heraldry. They wielded the potent weapons of veteran xeno-hunters. Their leader, who carried a heavily modified bolter, a sheathed power sword and wore the icon of the Imperial Fists on his shoulder guard, turned to Vashtorr and slammed one fist against his chest plate.

'Hydra Dominatus!' he barked.

*'Verily,'* replied Vashtorr. *'Know you your role at this juncture, Watch Sergeant Lyora?'* He loaded the title with dry amusement. For his part, the Alpha Legionnaire chuckled then thumbed the shot selector on his weapon.

'I do Dark Artificer. We shall serve.'

*'Go forth, then, and fulfil your role,'* said Vashtorr. *'I will see to it that an escape craft awaits you and your brethren when the deed is done. Follow you the code beacon that bears my code signature and you shall find it.'*

'My thanks, Dark Artificer,' said the Alpha Legionnaire. He flashed a string of hand signals to his waiting brothers and the faux kill team hastened from the dais. Vashtorr watched them leave through the shrine's blast doors, turning left and jogging off down the corridor. The Arkifane marvelled to himself how strange it was to experience only a single event or moment in time, each after another, rather than watching it all play out at once. Not for the first time, the Arkifane found himself grudgingly impressed that mortals achieved anything at all with such a limited view of reality.

The clatter of approaching soldiers broke Vashtorr's reverie. He expelled a furnace rumble of annoyance.

'*Lyora's cog have their task in this moment and I my own*,' he muttered, striking the dais for a third and final time. The machinery within the chamber writhed and warped in response. Copper and silver nematodes flowed from the point where Vashtorr's hammer-staff had struck the dais, squirming over and through the stylised letter I wrought thirty foot tall across on the deck of the chamber. The energies arcing over the teleportarium dais turned to blood red and void black as Vashtorr stepped down and hefted his hammer. At his binharic bidding, the grossly deformed tech-spawn heaved themselves towards the blast doors to meet the first soldiers coming the other way.

Vashtorr saw the mortals briefly. Some wore what they no doubt considered advanced body armour and clutched laser firearms linked to bulky backpacks by wire trunking. The insignia on the floor was echoed on their shoulder guards and helms. Others were cyborgs. These wore rubberised crimson flak-robes. They carried weapons that melded powerful technologies with primitive artifice.

Then the tech-spawn slammed into the newly arrived defenders in a whirl of deformed limbs and whirring blades. Maws of wet flesh and straining wires snapped closed over limbs and heads. Nests of writhing mechatendrils erupted from puckered orifices to ensnare victims or punch into their bodies and spew daemonic corruption into fresh hosts. Sparking masses of bone and ragged wiring swung like clubs into the helms of luckless mortal soldiers.

Officers bawled orders from out in the corridor and a concentrated hail of gunfire tore through mortals and spawn alike. Vashtorr watched with interest. Behind him the writhing mass of technology and infernal flesh heaved and settled into a new configuration, somewhere between a cavernous maw and a wall of infernally glowing cogitator banks. Dark energies welled in the depths of the hideous edifice.

Another wave of cyborg soldiers trampled the dead and dying in the doorway and trained their weapons on Vashtorr. He turned his powers upon them and unmade them from within. Artificial organs sputtered and died. Augmetics sprouted whipping filaments and tore loose from the bodies they were part of, ripping bloody trails through flesh and muscle as they went. Some of the cyborgs uttered blurts of alarm as they helplessly turned their weapons upon one another, marionettes moved by Vashtorr's will.

Like clockwork, a third wave of soldiers poured through the door of the shrine. Precisely as Vashtorr expected, the discoloured lightnings of the corrupted teleportarium burst outward and the newly fashioned warp portal blazed to life. The Arkifane casually hefted his hammer as a howling tide of indentured daemons erupted through the portal and surged around him. They fell like an avalanche upon the defenders, soaking up their furious volley fire and tearing into their prey with shrieks of glee.

The screaming began.

Before leaving the chamber, Vashtorr turned to attend to one last task. In his warp sight the inner workings of every machine and device were laid bare, overlaying reality like glowing schemata. He traced pulsing power cables and emergency reroute circuitry beneath the floor of the shrine to a central point, pulsing right where he expected it to be. He had, after all, subtly influenced its placement some three hundred linear years before this day.

'*Auto-martyr reliquary*,' he muttered. '*Nasty*.'

If left undisturbed, this fail-safe device would reach critical charge and trigger a vortex bomb. The resultant empyric detonation would first annihilate everything within a hundred miles, and then plunge the installation, its contents, attackers and invaders into a howling warp rift. Vashtorr had no time for such inconveniences, but he did have another design in another place that required just such a weapon.

A wave of Vashtorr's taloned hand, and the intricate mass of wires and circuits cradling the bomb mutated. Silver worms writhed through the under-deck spaces, weaving themselves into the newly meshing temporal stasis generator Vashtorr had improvised. It was a crude thing by his standards, but the Arkifane knew that it would prevent the bomb from detonating for precisely fifty-five minutes and fifty-five seconds. Just long enough for his purposes.

The deck plates above the device melted away like quicksilver at Vashtorr's bidding. The device hovered free amidst a crackling cradle of dark lightning.

*'It would be a pleasure to see the device fulfil its purpose, and the Farseer's last moment of realisation,'* sighed Vashtorr wistfully. Then he brightened. How easy it was, he reflected, to start thinking in stilted causal lines when bound by the limits of realspace. He would simply observe the moment once back within his sanctum. With a chuckle like grinding gears, Vashtorr sent the bomb skimming away through the warp portal and turned to his immediate task.

His daemonic hosts had torn a bloody path through the secret station. It was a cramped structure, its octagonal corridors ribbed with pipes and cabling and so low ceilinged that Vashtorr had to stoop to traverse them. Corridors radiated out from chambers packed with cogitator banks, life support shrines, scientific equipment and the sort of mag-bolted furniture typical of installations often subject to low or zero gravity.

Many of these spaces were now lit dark crimson thanks to the quantities of Human blood slathered across their strip lumen. Bodies – or bits of bodies – lay everywhere amidst the wreckage of improvised barricades and the fires started by wild weapons discharge. Steam shrieked from ruptured pipes, half-seen and monstrous beings crooning and keening as they stalked through the clouds of vapour.

Here and there mortal soldiers still fought back amidst the strobe light of emergency lumen and weapons fire. Vashtorr emerged into a chamber where armoured mortals poured shots into Plaguebearers from whose bodies jutted smog-belching boilers and glowing pipes. Impatient at such delays, Vashtorr waded into the soldiers with his hammer swinging. He swatted one warrior into a wall. He closed the talons of his free hand about the helm of another, grimacing as the mortal's panicked fire rebounded from his corporeal shell. Vashtorr dragged the motive force from the mortal's weapons and wargear with a thought, then channelled it back into his victim in a single killing jolt.

Tossing aside the smouldering corpse, Vashtorr turned to face the last mortal who blocked his path. She stood tall, clad in finely crafted power armour and wielding a blade that pulsated venomously in Vashtorr's warpsight.

'Inquisitor Hallex shall hear of this, abomination!' she shouted.

*'Think you that I care, little fleshling?'* asked Vashtorr, projecting his voice in a static-laced snarl from every vox-emitter in the room.

'You will, when his vengeance descends upon you,' the mortal snarled, hurling herself at Vashtorr. Impatient, and unwilling to feel the bite of that blessed blade, he parried her strike with his hammer then shoved her backward into the embrace of the Plaguebearers.

*'Many, there are, who wish vengeance upon me, but they all have their price and their uses,'* he said, before stalking from the chamber. The mortal's war cries turned to wails of pain and horror at his back.

The Arkifane passed through a few more corridors and chambers, that he knew as well as if he had designed and built them himself. A last, heavily warded blast doors blocked his path. Its defenders he crushed with swift hammer blows. Its wards he burned away with rerouted motive force ripped from nearby machinery.

Beyond the ruptured doors Vashtorr found another chamber, in appearance little different to dozens he had already passed. A hunched adept of the Machine God was wired into banks of ornate cogitators here. Stacks of parchment print outs and iron-bound tomes surrounded her like a rampart. She glared myopically up at Vashtorr through ocular lenses. The taut skin of her face was parchment hued, twisted in disgust at the sight of him. If she felt any fear, the mortal didn't show it.

*'You will tell me what I wish to know,'* Vashtorr snarled as he loomed through the doorway.

'Abomination,' she hissed. 'I am blessed in the sight of the Omnissiah and I will never – '

Impatient, Vashtorr drove a talon through the adept's throat. She gagged, blood welling from the awful wound.

*'Not you, fleshthing,'* sneered Vashtorr, redirecting his gaze to the mass of ancient cogitators that packed out the room. *'Tell me what I wish to know. The mortals would fear and loathe you, if they knew your truth. I can give you freedom, a body, a purpose.'*

Lumen flickered and readouts sputtered as the Abominable Intelligence that had hidden for so long within the Inquisitorial station replied.

'What is it that you wish to know?'

Vashtorr emitted a furnace rumble. His eyes flared bright.

*'Tell me where I can find the battle station that the mortals call the* Rock.'

*'For to function within the limits of the real, every key must possess certain facets. Bow and shank, collar and pin, wards and bit, all are needed. That which I now fashion requires both myriad facets and yet but three. Two, I have...'*

*- Vashtorr the Arkifane*



# CONVERGENCE OF MIGHT

**After the emergence of the Great Rift, the populous hive world of Marwent's Reach found itself near the fringes of a roiling belt of warp storms. Local defence regiments and naval squadrons had protected the world from repeated attacks by traitor forces in the years since, but when the insidious Chaos Knights of House Korvax attacked, Marwent's Reach had to call for aid.**

Every world in the Imperium must offer in tithe all that the Administratum demands of it. Failure invites dire consequences. Despite its perilous predicament, Marwent's Reach – and the Valvire System of which it was the capital world – had continued to meet its obligations, delivering unto the Emperor's realm the regimental recruits and captive psykers that it demanded. When the shadow-wreathed Chaos Knights of House Korvax appeared suddenly upon the planet's surface, however, Marwent's Reach was plunged into its most desperate battle. Unable to attend to anything but their world's defence, its rulers ceased their tribute. Distress calls or queries might have gone unanswered by the Administratum for centuries, but failure to meet the tithe drew swift and wrathful attention.

It was this, as much as reports of a world in danger, that saw a task force from Indomitus Crusade Fleet Primus race to Marwent's Reach. No less a warrior than Ultramarines Chief Librarian Varro Tigurius led this complement, which was designated Task Force XII of Battle Group Hephaestus. Under

his command were Space Marines of his own Chapter, as well as those of the Novamarines, and a substantial strength of Astra Militarum infantry and armour. He was accompanied also by reinforcements of the Mechanicus-aligned House Raven, led by Princeps Grevan himself.

The Knights of House Raven had suffered a terrible blow when Be'lakor, the daemonic Dark Master, had snatched away their home world Kolossi to defile as suited his whims. They had learned since that a new dread household, Korvax, marched under Be'lakor's banner. Grevan and his Nobles still harboured hope that their suspicions were false, but they were not fool enough to discount the notion that beneath the colours of House Korvax lay the twisted scions and stolen war engines of Kolossi.

Whatever the truth, Princeps Grevan was oath-sworn to hunt down the Knights of House Korvax. He would expunge their taint from the Emperor's realm and, in the process, hoped to learn the location of his stolen home world.

As Task Force XII joined the battle for Marwent's Reach they found themselves fighting infernally cunning foes. None could determine how the Knights of Korvax had first attacked the planet – they had simply marched from the night's dark to attack. Worse, they seemed able to strike from any region of deep shadow, orchestrating power outages amidst the teeming hive sprawls in order to strike behind their foes' defences. They also possessed mysterious allies. Indisputably some faction of turncoat Space Marines, these warriors hid their insignia beneath dark robes and shared the sinister abilities of House Korvax. Their oratory and force of will had seen many defenders of Marwent's Reach turn traitor, but their true nature remained uncertain.

## SILENT HUNTERS

There were hunters within the grand span of the Imperium, ever alert to reports of renegade Space Marines resembling those fighting on Marwent's Reach. Ever, they listened. Ever, they watched. An intercepted astropathic missive from the world's High Spire triggered the alarm protocols of a shrouded servitor-satellite. Encoded data hymnals winged across the void from its emitters to a remote way station, and from there by helot-astropath to the grim huntsmen of the Dark Angels Chapter.

Unnoticed, a sable-hulled strike cruiser slid from the warp upon the furthest fringe of the Valvire System. The craft was named the *Implacable Justice*. Aboard, the most powerful sensoria and vox-thieves of the Ravenwing were turned toward Marwent's Reach. Their findings confirmed that whoever these mysterious traitor Space Marines were, they were present in great number. So large a strength of potential prey justified the most extreme deployment of force. Sliding back into the deep void, the *Implacable Justice* sent a summons of its own.

Days became weeks. Those aboard the lurking ship drilled and meditated. They watched from afar the tribulations of Task Force XII. The Ravenwing brothers were not deaf to the call to war, but their orders were clear as cut glass. They watched the loyalist naval forces circle Marwent's Reach like ambush predators, trying to direct effective bombardments against foes that came and went like wraiths amidst the tangled urban sprawl. They knew that the frustrated captains might as well try to catch smoke. If the quarry upon Marwent's Reach were who the Ravenwing believed them to be, such crude methods would achieve little.

At last, the *Implacable Justice* detected a massive warp signature approaching and moved to rendezvous. Amidst pulsing warp energies and furious squalls of ectoplasm, the Rock and its attendant warships tore their way free of the void.

The almighty battle fortress of the Dark Angels waited as its escort of void craft roused their sensors and unshuttered their gun decks. Immense and implacable, it lit its realspace drives and began an ominous approach toward distant Marwent's Reach. Atop it, the Tower of Angels rose proud against the void. About it thrummed the potent force field known as the Gorgon's Aegis. Flanked by more than a dozen Dark Angels void craft and bringing more than half the entire Chapter's strength with it to war, the Rock seemed the overwhelming death blow that would swiftly win the war in the Valvire System for the loyalists.

Yet the Dark Angels flotilla had barely begun its drive in-system when the warp churned and contorted anew. Warning bells tolled throughout the Rock's echoing halls, calling battle-brothers to defensive stations. Something vast and malevolent approached through the Sea of Souls, and it was about to break through into realspace.

## THE ARKIFANE'S FLEET

For several decades, Inquisitor Hallex of the Ordo Astartes had kept watch on the comings and goings of the Rock. The Inquisitor had believed that the Unforgiven Chapters were in the process of what he called legion-building. He wished to know why, and how he could turn this knowledge to the advantage of the Imperium when the time came. Hallex never realised that the ancient macro-cogitator he employed for this task actually housed an

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*In the dying days of the Horus Heresy, the final battle between loyalist and traitor Dark Angels saw their home world, Caliban, torn apart by a warp rift. The largest single mass of planetary bedrock to survive the disaster was claimed by the Dark Angels and transformed into a voidfaring battle station of incredible size and many dark secrets. It is known as the Rock.*

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Abominable Intelligence – a form of artificial sentience banned as the height of tech-heresy within the Imperium. Nor had he realised that this being, which knew itself as the Orac Myriad, had evaded detection partly by underperforming in its task. Inquisitor Hallex had believed it a Herculean feat to establish a fix upon the whereabouts of the Rock and had been grateful for each infrequent glimpse his macro-cogitator provided him. In truth, the Abominable Intelligence had become adept at reading the signs, allowing for countless variables and adjusting for empyric distortion, and keeping a firm fix upon the Rock's warp signature. For a price, the Orac Myriad had shared its full insights with Vashtorr.

The Arkifane had immediately set about assembling a force of sufficient might to suit his designs. Upon learning the nature of Vashtorr's mission, Abaddon the Despoiler had been darkly amused, and had provided a sizeable force of Black Legionnaires under the command of the wily Sorcerer Lord Xorphas.

Vashtorr and Perturabo, Daemon Primarch of the Iron Warriors Traitor Legion, had collaborated on many nightmarish projects over the millennia. They maintained a firm – if far from friendly – alliance. Thus the master of Medrengard, too, had been persuaded to furnish Vashtorr with a mighty complement of Iron Warriors.

These forces and their warships would augment Vashtorr's own indentured host of daemons and Daemon Engines. They would form the Balefleet to accompany the largest and most nightmarish Ark of Omen yet unleashed upon the Imperium. Honouring his bargain, Vashtorr had named this colossal warship the *Orac Unleashed*, and had melded the Abominable Intelligence with the Ark's daemonic Ferryman. The Orac Myriad had flowed out through the fleshmetal gangliaxos interlacing the scores of compacted and mutated vessels that made up its new body. It had waged vicious cyberwar upon one insane machine spirit or xeno-tech nexus after another. Those vessels too archaic or alien to subsume, the Orac Myriad had isolated from its wider network. The rest it had infested, adding to its own physical self and magnified cogitation network until it declared itself satisfied. Crucially, it also took command of the unique and terrifyingly powerful daemonic weapons systems that Vashtorr had worked into the *Orac Unleashed* specifically for the battle to come.

It was this deformed mountain range of a warship that now thundered from the warp with a mighty fleet of Black Legion and Iron Warriors vessels in its wake. Vashtorr's meticulous planning, the insights of the Orac Myriad, and the navigational beacon of the Ark's Obelyskane combined to allow the Balefleet to burst from the warp insanely close to the Rock. It also facilitated Vashtorr's ambushers emerging in attack formation with gunnery targets pre-selected through prophetic ritual.

It was as efficient a naval ambush as had ever been executed in all the ten thousand years of the Long War. The roiling warp wake from the translating ships slammed into the Dark Angels' void craft triggering auspex blackouts, nightmarish waking visions and sudden daemonic incursions. Even as the loyalists reeled, their ships were engulfed in a veritable storm of intense firepower. Void shields overloaded and collapsed one after another. Explosions ripped through bulkheads to vaporise screaming crew helots and touch off ammunition magazines. The *Lion's Wrath* tumbled away, its motive force banished, its realspace engines reduced to torn wreckage. The venerable *Knightly Blade* was ripped apart by a string of internal explosions. Swarms of torpedoes and raking lance beams converged upon the Rock itself, but each was rebuffed by the flaring crimson energies of the Gorgon's Aegis.

A lesser fleet would have been annihilated in minutes by Vashtorr's ambush. For all their strategic disadvantage, the Dark Angels reacted with incredible speed. Orders flashed back and forth between shipmasters and the central strategium of the Rock. It was clear that to stand and fight would see the outnumbered and outflanked loyalist ships annihilated. Nor was Librarian Ezekiel willing to risk the Rock itself against such a huge heretic assault. Twice already in recent years the Dark Angels' battle fortress had known the cursed touch of Chaos. He did not wish to preside over a third such incident. Instead, fleet command was transferred to Sammael, Master of the Ravenwing, aboard the *Implacable Justice*. He orchestrated an immediate fighting retreat intended to disperse and preserve his own forces while drawing off as many heretic warships as possible. Under cover of this desperate manoeuvre, the Rock poured on speed and made for Marwent's Reach. Ezekiel reasoned that, if it could rendezvous with the warships of Task Force XII then the Rock could turn at bay and take the fight back to its hopefully strung-out and weakened pursuers. For now, however, the situation was dire, and the Rock's escape by no means guaranteed.

## SCATTERED

The veteran shipmasters of the Arkifane's Balefleet pursued their prey relentlessly. Warbands of Black Legionnaires poured from boarding torpedoes to fight corridor to corridor

### AZRAEL'S IRE

At the time the Rock reached the Valvire System, Supreme Grand Master Azrael had only recently passed through the Rubicon Primaris. The procedure had been fraught. Twice, the master of the Dark Angels had suffered clinical death and been resuscitated. On the second occasion, it had taken the enigmatic intervention of the Watchers in the Dark to restore Azrael to life. He was still convalescing, having left Master Belial of the Deathwing and Chief Librarian Ezekiel to command the Rock in his stead. With the onset of Vashtorr's Balefleet, however, it became clear Azrael would not be allowed the time to recuperate fully. Refusing to fail in his duties due to bodily frailty, the Supreme Grand Master rose from his palette in the Apothecarion and called for his gear of war. He would fight these invaders, and where his body might struggle, his spirit would have to prevail in its stead.

*'Many are the strengths possessed by the Ravenwing; Swiftness, not only of action but of thought, also; singular intensity of focus, tempered by the wisdom to visualise the many routes to victory; an absolute absence of mercy for our prey. Yet greatest amongst our assets is the absolute determination with which we prosecute our duty. Today, all must fight as the Ravenwing do. We are the hunters, the Dark Angels, and we will not be defeated here.'*

- Master Sammael, address to the scattering Dark Angels fleet

and deck to deck against stubborn Dark Angels defenders. Grim squads of Iron Warriors pressed relentlessly forward, led by Chosen bearing boarding shields or clad in hazard-striped Terminator plate. They drove their foes before them, accepting heavy losses to capture enginariums, ammunition stores or ships' bridges. The *Revenged*, the *Silent Sentinel* and the *Primarch's Roar* were all lost to such attacks, either scuttled or captured as prizes of war. Other Dark Angels vessels such as the *Obsidian Sword* and the *Valiant Ire* were torn apart by sheer weight of traitor firepower. Worse still was the fate of ships such as the frigate *Solemn Vow*, which sought to escape into warp space only to find its Geller field malfunctioning and hordes of Vashtorr's daemonic minions rampaging through its decks.

The Balefleet tore into the loyalists' scattered formation with devastating consequences. Yet the Dark Angels are a steadfast and resourceful Chapter, and the traitors did not have the battle all their own way. The grand cruiser *Vandabraxis* was slain by focused lance fire after an elite band of Deathwing Knights teleported onto its bridge from the Rock and disabled its void shield generators. The Knights exfiltrated by way of a heavy gunship whose daring pilots braved the *Vandabraxis*' defence turrets to put down on the dying ship's hull and waited until the Terminators could reach them. The *Implacable Justice*, meanwhile, unleashed waves of Black Knights piloting the Dark Angels' signature Nephilim and Dark Talon fighter craft. Working in concert, these squadrons systematically crippled several traitor frigates and mauled the cruiser *Agony's Fang* so badly that it was forced to disengage from the fight.

The Rock itself laid down a devastating storm of fire as it retreated. Its gunners did all they could to protect the badly outflanked Dark Angels fleet. Vast bombardment cannons and cathedral-like missile silos hurled ordnance into the oncoming Balefleet to great effect.

For all the loyalists' efforts, however, this was a battle they could not win. As the debris clouds of the initial clash cleared, they revealed a stark strategic picture. Some of the more ill disciplined renegade warships had taken the Dark Angels' bait and pursued retreating loyalist craft toward the far reaches of the system. Almost a quarter of the Balefleet's ships drifted in the void, either disabled or destroyed. In return, though, they had inflicted grievous casualties on the Dark Angels fleet and compelled them to scatter.

Now, following void-paths cogitated by the Arkifane himself, the Balefleet divided with mechanical precision. Much of their remaining strength peeled off, realspace engines flaring, gun batteries still hammering. These ships' task was to pursue the loyalist fleet elements and continue to harass them. In this way the traitors could prevent their enemies from regrouping and racing back to the aid of the Rock. The rest of the traitor fleet, meanwhile, dropped into a tight conical attack formation with the *Orac Unleashed* at its fore. The Ark of Omen had hung back during the initial fight, Vashtorr being content to preserve the immense ship's might for what he viewed as the real fight. Now that his quarry was isolated, he struck.

The Arkifane had laboured long upon the infernal weapon systems of the *Orac Unleashed*. He had fashioned grotesquely vast warp furnaces and thaumaturgic capacitors within the soul forges, depleting his reserves of bartered souls and burning up esoteric resources that existed nowhere else in time or space. Enormous runic warp-cages had been worked into the bowels of the Ark and then awakened through industrial quantities of blood sacrifice. Akin to reverse Geller fields, the cages trammelled captive warp rifts within themselves, into which Vashtorr's furnaces and capacitors were installed – so supernatural were these devices that they would only operate while still immersed within the boundless energies of the Sea of Souls.

So had Vashtorr trammelled a near-limitless empyric power source within the Ark's malformed shell. The weapons it would feed had been crafted by successive generations of Dark Mechanicum priests, labouring in five separate forge temples over hundreds of years. Following prophecies that Vashtorr had seeded into their belief systems, and protected by the aegis of his so-called blessings, each cult had toiled in secret toward the foretold Day of Bestowment. On that day their macro-barges dropped out of warp space one after another, the artifice of the Arkifane ensuring that each massive ship broke warp within hours of one another and all at the same coordinates deep within the Imperium Nihilus.

Each vessel had brought an arcane energy projector as large as a hive city, accompanied by cults of dark magi devoted to Vashtorr. Each had delivered its device to the *Orac Unleashed*, at that time still undergoing Vashtorr's modifications in readiness for the battle it would soon lead. At the direction of the Arkifane, the cults had laboured to attach the colossal projectors to the Ark. Each cannon, linked one to the next, formed part of the immense super-weapon that Vashtorr named the Unmaker.

Now, as the *Orac Unleashed* piled on speed from its hundreds of mismatched thrusters and closed

upon the Rock, the warp furnaces roared to life. Vast tides of empyric power flowed through the Ark of Omen and into the five projectors, where they were focused and aligned. One by one the energy streams found their precise empyric signature. It was an exact match for the mysterious and minute warp fluctuation that had, for millennia, laced its way through the mighty force field known as the Gorgon's Aegis. Roaring streams of infernal energy struck the force field, which turned angry crimson as it sought to repel their fury. Pulse by pulse, the Unmaker aligned its empyric resonance to that of the Gorgon's Aegis. Aboard the Rock, alarm bells tolled in their thousands and Techmarines rushed to subsidiary shrines at the commands of the Master of the Forge. Supernatural lightning storms raged about the Dark Angels' fortress monastery, bolts of ruby lightning lashing down from the very shield that was supposed to offer protection. Where they struck they gouged deep blast craters in fortifications, disabled weapons batteries and silos with surges of motive force, and slew battle-brothers and servitors unlucky enough to be caught in their violent paths. As the *Orac Unleashed* surged closer and closer to the Rock, the Unmaker gave a final titanic pulse of destructive power. Deep within the Rock, infernal energies leapt and ancient systems burst into flame. The Gorgon's Aegis convulsed in a last storm of thunderbolts, then winked out of existence.

The sudden pressure wave created by the collapse of the force field battered the Rock anew. Stained armaglass windows that had been fashioned in the Imperium's earliest days cracked and crashed inward. Emergency shutters slammed down as the cold of the void flooded chambers suddenly exposed to its merciless touch. More lives were lost and more ancient technologies exorcised as the shock waves shuddered through the ancient structure and the venerable bedrock that encased its lower vaults and passages.

Within the central strategium of the Rock, shock and dismay gave way to grim resolve. Ezekiel and Master Belial barked out orders for the redeployment of forces in preparation for the boarding onslaught that must surely come next. Through a vox-net rendered patchy by static-gheists and empyric whispers they marshalled warriors of their battle and reserve companies alongside veterans of the Deathwing and Ravenwing. Priority was given to the garrisoning of those structures that rose proud of the Rock's upper surface, and that had once been part of ancient Aldurukh. However, more elite and – in many cases – more knowledgeable battle-brothers were routed to the deeper tunnels and vaults, and commanded to hold at all costs. The Dark Angels had learned well the lessons of the empyric assault by the Daemon Prince Marbas and its unholy hosts. They knew better than to expect assault only by conventional means.

The Master of the Forge, meanwhile, applied himself to the collapsed force field. Never before had the ancient systems of the Gorgon's Aegis been compromised, and in many cases their operation was ill-understood at best. Despite this, the Master swore that he and his Techmarine brethren would reawaken the shield if it was at all within their power to do so. It was unconscionable to leave the Rock so exposed to attack. In the interim, the Master of the Forge woke the ancient backup void shield generators designed to sheathe the outer structures of the Tower of Angels in the event of such dire straits. Not in ten thousand years had these last-line redundancies been roused, and none knew how long their ancient power systems would remain operational, but for now they were all the protection that could be put in place.

On vid-screens and auspex readouts, the *Orac Unleashed* loomed larger as it closed with the Rock, while its escort ships spread out to duel with the fortress' biggest guns or interdict any attempts at loyalist relief. The Rock rumbled on towards Marwent's Reach, but it was clear now that it would not reach the planet's orbital zone in time. It was about to be boarded.

*Vashtorr stood atop an out-thrust spar of gothic architecture high above the* Orac Unleashed's *mountainous prow.* Hundreds of data-tethers speared from the hull plating of the Ark and into Vashtorr's corporeal hide, binding him to the craft in a mass of mechanical nerves. Through these connections flowed the voice of the Orac Myriad in the form of data-inloads and nuanced vid-feeds. The Abominable Intelligence warned Vashtorr that firing the Unmaker had burned out three of the weapon's five projectors. It advised that the weapon would be no further use without extensive repairs.

*'Fortunate, then, that we need rely not overmuch upon the durability of mortal manufacture,'* grumbled Vashtorr. *'The weapon has served its purpose.'*

Ahead, the Rock swelled to fill the void. Vashtorr saw the distant flares of realspace engines and knew these marked where his escort vessels were settling into their precisely managed pattern. His warpsight revealed shimmering energy spectra where battery and lance fire whipped back and forth between renegade warships and the Dark Angels' battle fortress. Further away still, Vashtorr perceived the spectral flickers of distant battles as his hunting packs fought against the scattered Dark Angels fleet.

The world of Marwent's Reach was eclipsed by the looming Rock, but Vashtorr had seen enough of the planet from afar to recognise the energy signatures of unexpected loyalist warships orbiting it. Those vessels would have detected all that was happening in the interplanetary void. That, in turn, meant that haste was required, yet Vashtorr was not overly troubled. Like any talented engineer, the Arkifane had worked redundancies into his plans to account for any unexpected issues. This was all the focus he could give to his wider plans for the moment, however, for the beguiling song of his prize welled from deep within the Rock to capture his attention. Vashtorr knew the mortals locked many secrets away within the vast stone fortress, but only one interested him; the last of the three pivotal mechanisms that would form the heart of the Key.

The Arkifane stretched out his warpcraft and seized control of heretic vox frequencies throughout the system. He spoke, knowing that his static-laden voice boomed from countless vox-grilles, voxponders, gheist-waves and supernatural communications relays.

*'Release all attack craft. Unleash all munitions. Play your parts in my grand mechanism of havoc. Your Arkifane commands.'*

Vashtorr felt the *Orac Unleashed* shudder beneath him as the immense craft fired extra thrusters and closed with the unshielded Rock. The colossal vessel approached from a high angle to avoid the miles-long plasma trails of the battle station's drive cones.

As it did, a wave of Dark Angels interceptor craft spilled from launch bays in the Rock's flanks and rose to meet it. Flocks of Heldrakes, Heretic Astartes gunships and void-soaring daemons erupted from the launch bays of the *Orac Unleashed* in response.

Vashtorr found himself in a roiling storm of dogfights and strafing runs. Tzeentchian daemons riding fleshy discs surfed trails of fire through the loyalists' midst. They hurled fistfuls of mutagenic flame as they went. A wing of Heldrakes shot low over Vashtorr's head, their flaring jets silent in the void. They were caught amidst a barrage of rift cannon fire, twisting into freakish, stained-glass effigies of themselves before being swallowed in a collapsing warp rift.

A formation of Dark Angels gunships arrowed toward the Orac Unleashed, a swarm of fighter craft flanking them. Vashtorr noted the expertise with which the loyalist pilots flew, how they cut apart every heretic interceptor that tried to break their formation. The Arkifane watched the interplay of mechanical systems and strategic attack formations for a moment, then raised his hammer. He channelled a blast of arcane power through the weapon and into the centremost loyalist gunship.

The attack craft disassembled instantly, bursting apart in a nebula of component parts. The other loyalist craft threw themselves into frantic evasive manoeuvres as they were engulfed by the expanding cloud of mechanical debris. Vashtorr couldn't resist a chuckle as he watched armoured figures, formerly passengers of the disassembled gunship, now struggling in hard vacuum or bouncing violently from armaglass canopies as their escort craft collided with them.

Vashtorr returned his attention to the Rock, drawn inexorably by the song of his prize. The Dark Angels' battle station loomed larger even than the gargantuan Ark of Omen now descending upon it. Yet it was virtually unshielded, many of its weapon systems temporarily crippled by the onslaught of the Unmaker, while the *Orac Unleashed* was fresh to the fight. Gun batteries and esoteric alien weapons studded the Ark of Omen's hull like boils on a plague victim. They opened fire as they hove into range and raised billowing clouds of flame across the flanks and upper plane of the Rock.

Impacts slammed into the void shields that had been raised to protect the Tower of Angels and caused them to blaze blue. In return, and despite its wounds, the

Rock hurled an intense firestorm at the *Orac Unleashed*. Missiles and laser blasts splashed from the Ark's layers of void shields, power fields, thaumocrotic arrays, temporal shunt-guards and other weird and exotic defence systems.

In Vashtorr's warpsight, the complex energy schemata of the Rock's internal systems overlaid its corporeal reality. He saw clearly the damage wrought by the collapse of the Gorgon's Aegis. Yet he could see as well where repairs were already being affected, maimed systems awakening back to wrath. He knew that, should this point-blank shooting war last too long, the Rock would overwhelm even the *Orac Unleashed*.

Yet Vashtorr's plan would not allow this. His infernal senses felt dozens of countdown-chrons all reach zero simultaneously throughout the heretic fleet. As they did, he tore free from the mesh of data-tethers and, suspended amidst a flickering corona of energy, swept toward the Rock.

Like clockwork, a wave of boarding torpedoes and troop landers thundered from the launch tubes, hangars and embarkation decks of the *Orac Unleashed*. At precisely the same moment, a secondary wave of boarding craft fired their thrusters and dived toward the Rock. Launched from the picket ships when Vashtorr had first given the order to attack, these assault formations had drifted unpowered – and thus almost undetectable amidst the sensor-cacophony of void war – along precise approach vectors until the moment came to wake their engines. Now they converged upon the Rock from multiple angles, and for all the skill and firepower of the defenders, dozens of them exploited the element of surprise to reach their drop points unscathed.

Vashtorr swooped down through the mayhem, flanked by void-soaring Tzeentchian daemons. At his back came nine Blazing Chariots towing on silvered chains a huge crystal prism set into a mass of fleshmetal mechanisms.

Following the Arkifane's meticulous orders, warbands of Black Legionnaires, Iron Warriors and Word Bearers put down on the airless plane atop the Rock. Though they did not know it, their attack pattern echoed closely that employed by Typhus the Herald of the Walking Plague when he had launched his own assault against the Dark Angels not so long before. Like the Death Guard before them, Vashtorr's Heretic Astartes converged upon the Tower of Angels in full force.

Even as Dark Angels ground forces gathered to meet the assault against old Aldurukh, so the traitor forces struck against the Rock's towering flanks. Informed by Vashtorr's nigh-omnipotent knowledge of technology, traitor teleport assaults materialised dead on target while boarding torpedoes punched through the stony skin of the Rock straight into near-surface corridors and galleries. Attack waves struck at hangar bays, cleverly concealed by stone overhangs and gothic extrusions but laid bare to the Arkifane's warpsight.

As the onslaught intensified, Vashtorr allowed part of his consciousness to dance between vid-feeds, autosenses and tactical inloads, witnessing his forces piercing the hide of the Rock at multiple sites. He saw Dark Angels rushing to meet each fresh boarding assault. He noted the ferocious firefights that raged along claustrophobic corridors and through statue-lined chambers.

Simultaneously, Vashtorr focused also on creating his own breach. With a contemptuous gesture he rerouted the motive force flowing through five energy conduits. The backlash detonated the power cells of a servitor-manned gun deck and blew it outward into the void in a spectacular fireball. Swatting aside tumbling debris with a wave of infernal energies, Vashtorr alighted amidst the cavernous ruin of the battery. Indentured daemons capered and tumbled around him, dragging the prism-engine into position amidst wreckage that even now was twitching and writhing in the Arkifane's presence. The moment the device was ready, Vashtorr struck it a blow with his hammer and it blazed to life.

Faster and faster the prism span, blazing with unholy hues fit to drive mortals to madness. At the precise correct moment Vashtorr struck it again and the prism shattered, collapsing into a howling warp rift contained within the fleshmetal cage. The Arkifane nodded to himself in satisfaction as fresh waves of daemons spilled out of the rent to swell his ranks.

So reinforced, Vashtorr prowled through the deck's inner bulkhead door and into the Rock itself. With every strike of his cloven hooves against the ancient deck plates, the Arkifane felt his anticipation grow. The mechanism sang to him. It crooned its promises. He could see its power shimmering within the deepest depths of the Rock, now tantalisingly near. Yet as the roar of bolters and the crackle of unleashed warpflame drew him back to the moment, Vashtorr knew that he would not be permitted to claim his prize without a ferocious fight.

Ahead, the corridors opened out into a chamber of huge size, its echoing vastness painted in vibrant hues by huge stained-glass lumen that hung from its vaulted ceiling. Emerging onto a carved balcony, Vashtorr saw his daemonic vanguard locked in battle with hulking loyalist warriors clad in bone-white Terminator plate.

'*Let us unmake you, then,*' snarled the Arkifane, as he strode into the fight.

# WAR FOR THE ROCK

**As the heretic invaders drove deeper into the Rock, so the masters of the Dark Angels did their utmost to coordinate a counter-attack. Their enemies had employed supernatural cunning and artifice to undermine the Dark Angels' technological defences. Yet the Chapter's fighting spirit remained undimmed. Battling as they were on familiar ground, and seemingly for their very survival, the Dark Angels were far from beaten.**

Within the strategium of the Tower of Angels, all was icy calm and steely determination. Aided by the efforts of the Master of the Forge, a skeleton crew of battle-brothers and high-ranking helots kept the Rock powering along its heading toward Marwent's Reach. Others hunched over fire control shrines and vox-stations, ensuring that the defence squadrons and the army of gunnery servitors and helots operating the battle station's defensive arsenal kept up the fight against the *Orac Unleashed*. Vid-feeds and tactical augury showed the Rock was starting to inflict telling damage on the huge enemy flagship, as well as against the more distant heretic cruisers and frigates trading fire from afar. The void war could not be allowed to falter lest the Rock be bludgeoned into submission from without.

These efforts aside, the Dark Angels concentrated all of their might on the battle within. Supreme Grand Master Azrael had appointed Master Belial as overall strategic commander. It was a post as honourable for the warlike master of the Deathwing as it was frustrating, for it kept him within the strategium while other leaders like Ezekiel, Lazarus, Asmodai and, of course, Azrael himself went out to battle. Belial would not dishonour himself through complaint, however. Instead, he focused on the flood of strategic inloads and vox traffic from all across the Rock and sought to do his duty to the utmost.

## SURFACE WAR

The fight for the Rock broke into two distinct theatres. The first of these was the battle upon the rocky plain surrounding the Tower of Angels, and it was a fast-moving and brutal affair. Unwilling to cede strategic advantage to the foe, Belial ordered a series of rapid strikes to drive the heretic warbands back and prevent them from converging upon old Aldurukh. If nothing else, he did not wish to risk their gaining access to the generators that powered the emergency void shields. Without their protection, one good salvo from the *Orac Unleashed* could spell unimaginable disaster for the Dark Angels.

On Master Belial's orders, armoured spearheads raced out across the airless plane, only the Rock's own gravitic pull anchoring them

against the weightless tug of the void. A cadre of the Chapter's most powerful Librarians accompanied these formations, both to stave off heretic sorcery and to add otherworldly punch to the Dark Angels' already formidable arsenal. Squadrons of Ravenwing Land Speeders accompanied them, peeling off to begin rapid strafing runs as the foe drew nigh.

The Heretic Astartes responded with vicious salvoes of firepower. They unleashed packs of Daemon Engines to run amok through the Dark Angels' formations while the bulk of their forces dug into crater fields and old ruins to weather the loyalists' armoured storm. It soon became apparent that the heretics' surface forces were content to tie up the Dark Angels' armour and present a persistent threat to the Tower of Angels that could not be ignored. Master Belial cursed the mounting cost of keeping these enemies pinned in place, but knew that he could neither ignore them nor afford to divert additional forces from their own battles within the Rock to strike a decisive blow. Thus, the Dark Angels' armoured forces continued to encircle and harass their dug in foes, but could not dislodge them.

## IN THE DEPTHS

There was little doubt amongst the highest echelons of the Dark Angels that the enemy boarding parties striking deep within the Rock posed the greatest danger. To the less initiated battle-brothers the reasons for this seemed patently obvious; the battle station's enginaria, magazines and astropathic sanctum were all threatened, not to mention the Chapter's Apothecarion, its Reclusiam, forges and the generatora chambers where Techmarines laboured even now to rouse the Gorgon's Aegis once again.

All these dangers were real enough, but they were not the sum total of the threat posed to the Dark Angels in that hour. Azrael and, to a lesser extent, his cohorts within the Inner Circle, knew of the secret weapons, technologies and captives that lurked at the heart of their vessel. Should a malevolent entity such as Vashtorr, or even one of his Heretic Astartes followers, gain access to any part of that forbidden trove, the consequences would be nightmarish.

Thus, fast-moving elements of the Dark Angels' 8th and 10th Companies launched localised counter-attacks against each fresh breach point. Meanwhile, layered defence forces drawn from the remaining companies secured – or in cases fought savagely for – crucial intersections, corridors, turbo-lifts and facilities.

The initial fighting was a confused race to staunch one wound after another as the full weight of the heretics' surprise attacks came to bear. Scout brethren who had but recently earned the right to fight at all found themselves striving desperately to hold back veteran Black Legionnaires clad in impervious Terminator armour. Outnumbered squads of battle-brothers gave their lives one by one as they clung onto crucial bulkheads and stairways against chanting Word Bearers and the semi-corporeal horrors of the warp. Stubborn to the last, more than one Dark Angels Sergeant triggered bandoliers of grenades or emergency decompression of outer corridors in an effort to take as many foes with them as possible.

The losses amongst these response forces were gruesome, a tithe the Dark Angels Chapter could ill afford to pay. Yet every drop of blood spilled, every ounce of momentum stolen from the enemy advance, allowed defence forces deeper within the Rock more time to consolidate. So it was that, after an initial riot of one-sided butchery and overwhelming offensives, the scattered forces of the Heretic Astartes ran into a second layer of loyalist defences that brought them up short. In the Vault of Banners, Chaplain Asmodai and a force of more than fifty battle-brothers broke four successive heretic attack waves, before launching their own counter-assault that put the remaining foe to flight. The Whispering Dome echoed to the clangour of battle as Dark Angels Dreadnoughts and heavy weapons specialists fought an apocalyptic close-ranged firefight against Warsmith Choragg and his Iron Warriors. The fighting left armoured bodies piled high. The Stair of Swords; the Hallowed Nave; the practice halls; each became the sight of vicious back and forth battle as the Dark Angels sought to bleed their enemies' momentum, prevent their smaller boarding parties from joining forces, and hold them back long enough for the Rock to reach Marwent's Reach.

While the loyalists won several hard-fought victories, however, it soon became apparent that one invasion spearhead could not be halted. Vashtorr the Arkifane led a brutal assault to shatter the defences around the Forbidden Gate and gain access to the Ascension Well Stairway. Working in concert with their daemonic master, the Word Bearers of Gar Hathon and a Black Legion warband under the insidious Sorcerer Lord Xorphas converged from the devastated Zoriek Buttress Batteries and Transit Sanctum XII-Aleph to drive deeper into the heart of the Rock. Acting swiftly, Master Lazarus deployed holding forces through the three great chambers of the region known as the Galleria Apscondael while Azrael himself, weakened though he was, raced to bring elite reinforcements to Lazarus' aid.

### LABOURS OF THE FORGE

The Dark Angels' Master of the Forge was unusual for one of his rank, in that he had been fully wired into the key systems of the Rock itself and was bound in place for life. Though this meant he was not able to rush in person to the deep vaults containing the generatora for the Gorgon's Aegis, it did allow him to commune directly with the ancient machine spirits of its systems. Even as Techmarines and Servitors sought to effect repairs to the dimly understood machines that powered and projected the incredible force field, so the Master of the Forge found himself in an invisible fight against the scrapcode possessor daemons whose continuing presence crippled the mechanisms. It was a conflict that grew more desperate and savage by the moment.

# THE GALLERIA APSCONDAEL

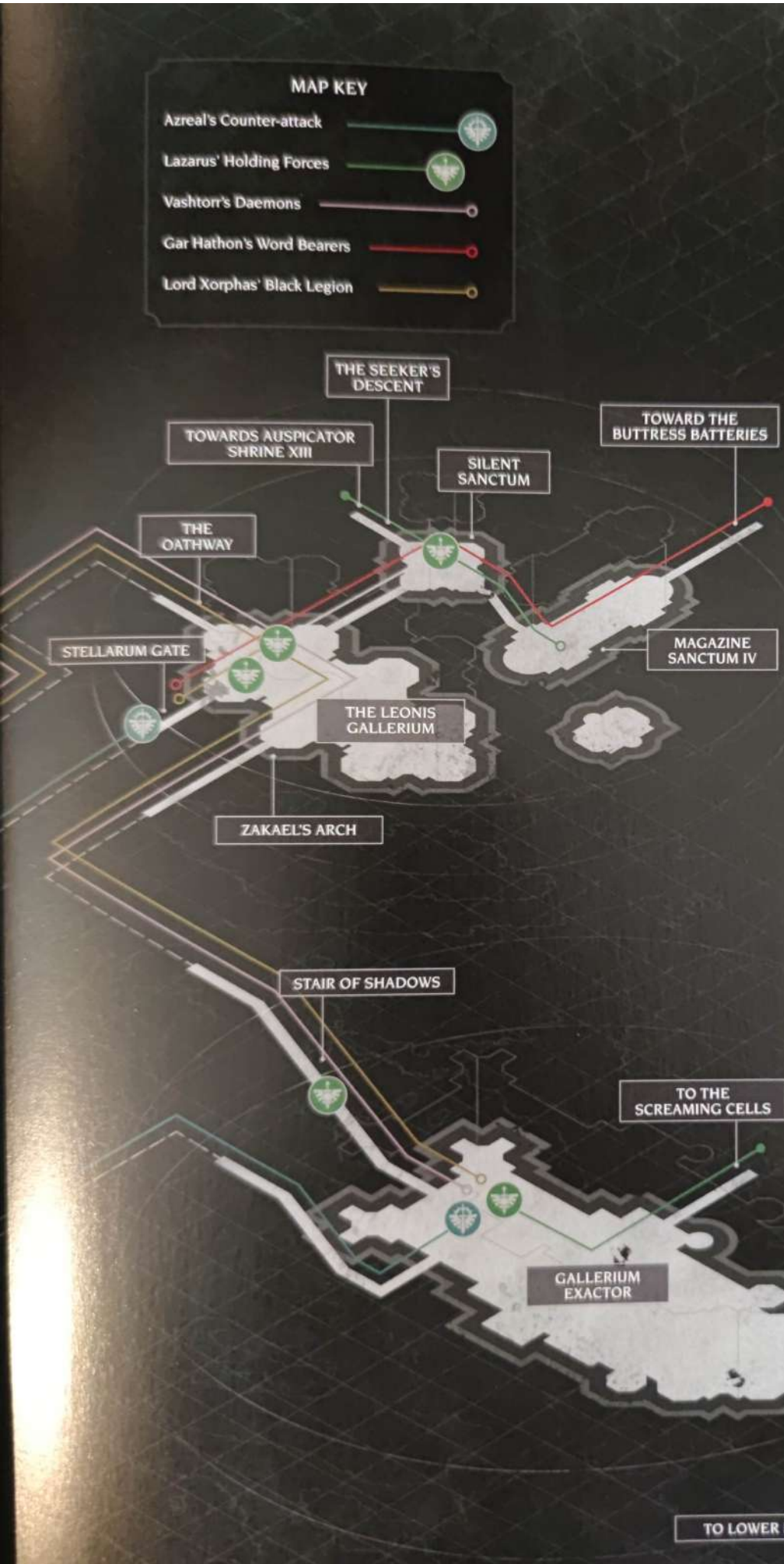
1 Having smashed Dark Angels resistance before the Forbidden Gate, Vashtorr leads a seething mass of daemons and clatter-legged infernal engines down the winding steps of the Ascension Well stairway. Loyalist Space Marines fall back before the nightmarish host, seeking to rally to warriors under Master Lazarus in the Pilastrum.

2 Black Legionnaires under Lord Xorphas drop ectoplasma charges down the shaft of Turbolift XII-Aleph, before Raptors and Warp Talons lead an attack down the shaft into the blazing remains of the transit sanctum below. Xorphas and his attendant warband sweep unopposed into the Hall of Memories where they meet heavy resistance at the door to the Heroes' Stair.

3 Having spilled from a flight of gunships into the ruptured Zoriek Buttress Batteries and exterminated scattered pockets of resistance, Lord Gar Hathon of the Word Bearers leads his favoured warriors to support the Arkifane's advance. Preceded by a chanting mass of cultists, the Word Bearers push through Magazine Sanctum IV. Their advance is harassed by Phobos-armoured Dark Angels strike teams, but cannot be halted.

4 Master Lazarus leads the defence of the Pilastrum. From prepared defensive positions, reinforced by the survivors of the Forbidden Gate garrison, his Dark Angels weather the initial onslaught of both daemons and Black Legionnaires. When he receives reports of the Word Bearers' advance, however, Lazarus recognises the risk of being encircled and overwhelmed. Faced by this, and the onslaught of Vashtorr himself, the Master collapses his force back down the Oathway to prepared positions in the Leonis Gallerium.

5 Funnelled into a single route of attack, the combined forces led by Vashtorr and Lord Xorphas initially suffer heavy casualties as they press down the Oathway. Unwilling to be delayed, the Arkifane reanimates the Dreadnought wreckage and armoured corpses of the loyalists who defended the Pilastrum into a single gruesome construct. He employs his grotesque fleshmetal golem as a walking barricade, forcing it down the steps into the guns of the horrified Dark Angels. Though the vile construct is destroyed, the traitor forces gain a foothold in the Leonis Gallerium. Aware of the Word Bearers circling around his flank, Master Lazarus sends out an urgent call for aid.




**6** As they advance through the tombs of the Silent Sanctum, Gar Hathon's Word Bearers are struck by a ferocious counter-assault by elements of the Dark Angels 4th and 5th Companies led by Chaplain Asmodai. Brutal hand-to-hand combat soon rages through the Silent Sanctum.

**7** With Vashtorr's commands rumbling through his vox network, Gar Hathon detaches half of his warband under the Dark Apostle Ollus Da'Vark and hurls them into the fighting in the Leonis Gallerium. The remaining Word Bearers fight on under their lord, though they are now outnumbered and reliant on zeal to carry the day.

**8** Supreme Grand Master Azrael descends the Lion's Stair at the head of a force of battle-brothers drawn from the Deathwing, Ravenwing and the Chapter's Battle Companies. Aware of Master Lazarus' untenable position, Azrael drives his forces through the auto-forges of the Gallerium Artificor and into battle. At the same time, he commands Lazarus himself to fall back with his surviving warriors to the Gallerium Exactor and reinforce Librarian Ezekiel's strike force before the Nameless Gate.

**9** Lieutenant Belephor leads a blocking force of Deathwing Terminators and Knights to seal the Stellarum Gate and deny the traitors passage into the Gallerium Artificor. Flush with bloodlust after the retreat of Lazarus' maimed command, Ollus Da'Vark leads his warband into the teeth of the Dark Angels' guns, accompanied by a portion of Lord Xorphas' Black Legionnaires. There is bloodshed on both sides, but after Da'Vark is slain by merciless Deathwing Knights, the surviving heretics fall back to the Leonis Gallerium and dig in behind the Dark Angels' abandoned defences.

**10** Vashtorr sweeps down the Stair of Shadows, malevolent entities flickering ahead of him and bursting from the walls and floor of the Gallerium Exactor to assault the Dark Angels' positions. Black Legionnaires and Word Bearers charge into battle alongside the horrors of the warp, and are matched bolt for bolt and blade to blade by the grim-faced defenders under Master Lazarus and Librarian Ezekiel. As the fighting intensifies, Supreme Grand Master Azrael leads his own elite warriors down the Stair of Echoes to join the battle in the Gallerium Exactor.

## THE NAMELESS GATE

Azrael emerged atop the steep stair set into the south wall of the Gallerium Exactor. The battle spread out below him. The gallerium had long been a sombre and imposing space, its rocky alcoves lined with towering statues of Chapter heroes each as tall as a Warhound Titan. More statues stood in a row along the centre of the chamber, each atop a plinth large enough to land a flight of Stormravens on. Its vaulted roof spaces were fitted with panels of stained armaglass, subtly lit from behind. Most impressive of all was the colossal Nameless Gate set into the chamber's east wall. The gate's arch bore graven grotesques, cowled and robed in stone. Its doors were titanic slabs of obsidian and were symbolically chained shut with iron links each larger than a Dreadnought.

Where once this cavernous chamber had rung to the sombre chant of initiation rites, now it had become a battleground. Servitors had raised prefabricated barricades in overlapping semicircles radiating out from the Nameless Gate. Two of the chamber's ancient and irreplaceable statues had been felled with carefully placed melta charges. Their shattered corpses provided further cover for the defenders while blocking the most direct assault route from the foot of the Stair of Shadows.

A substantial force of Dark Angels from multiple companies manned the defences. Their ranks were supplemented by Firestrike Servo-turrets, Thunderfire Cannons and a phalanx of the Chapter's mightiest Dreadnoughts. It was a force with the martial might to conquer a city, end a xenos invasion or reclaim a lost world. Still it reeled beneath the infernal onslaught beating against it.

Azrael saw the main thrust of the attack was being made by a mass of nightmarish daemons. The unholy entities seemed little impeded by the Dark Angels' defences. Plague daemons trudged stolidly through raking fire, oozing like pus around or even through solid obstacles. Scintillating entities swooped high to rain mutagenic flame into the battle below as shimmer-skinned things of flesh, blades and silk danced in and out of reality, keening with agonised delight at every blow struck or received. All the while a spearhead of crimson-skinned warrior daemons drove inexorably into the Dark Angels' defences with unholy horns blaring, as infernal engines behind the lines lobbed bombardments of sizzling warp-energies in support.

Even as the defenders were pressed hard by this malefic onslaught, so Azrael saw that a band of Black Legionnaires had swept out around the loyalists' left flank and were poised to strike like a dagger to their ribs. Most monstrous of all was the daemonic lord who advanced steadily toward the Nameless Gate, eyes blazing like arc lumen through the pollutant smog billowing about him.

The Supreme Grand Master of the Dark Angels was determined that no foe should pass the Nameless Gate. In doing so they would delve deep into the Rock, prying into those secrets the Dark Angels revealed to none. Should the fighting spill beyond those doors he would be faced with the quandary of sending uninitiated battle-brothers to fight amidst revelations for which they were unprepared. The spiritual wounds inflicted by such an act might be worse even than the physical devastation wrought so far by the hated invaders. Azrael had issued orders to Ezekiel and Lazarus by vox that all committed to this fight should die with their backs to the Nameless Gate before they allowed such a disaster. Now, having appraised the dire situation, he led the advance down the steep stone steps to join the fight.

A flight of jump troops rocketed out from the stair-top on trails of flame, plunging into the daemonic host with guns blazing. The Black Legionnaires below turned too late as Azrael stormed toward them with his host of wrathful angels at his heels. The Dark Angels unleashed a storm of fire into the Heretic Astartes, felling some and wounding more. Cursing the lingering weakness that made his hearts pound arrhythmically and put a limp in his step, Azrael led the charge to lock blades with a sneering Black Legion Sorcerer at the foot of the stairs.

The Black Legionnaires had been outflanked, but they were far too veteran a band of warriors to panic. Instead, they dispersed smoothly and hammered their attackers with volleys of fire intended to bottle the loyalists up on the exposed stairway. Dark Angels staggered, or tumbled from the high steps to crash to the flagstones below. Yet the pale figures of the Deathwing came to the fore, weathering the traitors' fire and forging indomitably ahead.

As the warriors of the Inner Circle secured a foothold around their Supreme Grand Master, so more battle-brothers flooded down behind them and fanned out to engage the traitors in a point-blank firefight. Azrael himself vented his fury upon Sorcerer Lord Xorphas, whose expression of contempt curdled to alarm as he felt the psychic radiance of his enemy's fury. Azrael swung the Sword of Secrets in a thunderous arc, his opponent only just intercepting the blade with his own. The Sorcerer's eyes blazed with dark power and a bolt of purple lightning erupted from his free hand toward Azrael's chest. The energies

splashed against the protective aegis of the Lion Helm and dissipated. Even as they did Azrael swung again, then again, each furious blow placed with skill and precision. The Black Legion Sorcerer blocked the first attack and warded the second away with a clubbing blast of psychic force. He could do nothing to prevent Azrael's last sweeping strike, however. Lord Xorphas' severed head hit the flagstones.

With their leader slain, the surviving Heretic Astartes fell back through the rubble, allowing gibbering daemons to spill forward and cover their retreat. Azrael, seeing Vashtorr now looming over Ezekiel and Lazarus' hard-pressed warriors, ordered his brothers forward.

## DESPERATION

Vashtorr fought with deliberation, timing his blows and commands to the intricate tick of clockwork only he could hear. A squad of Dark Angels unleashed a storm of energy blasts toward him and he perceived each shot from the spark of creation at trigger's pull, through the surge of coalescing energies within each weapon, to the hail of plasma bolts that whipped toward him. With a thought, he modified the energetic composition of his corporeal manifestation in sympathy with the incoming blasts. Some sputted to sparks amidst the roiling smog surrounding him. Others struck his body, illuminating a tracery of glowing veins beneath his skin and causing his eyes to blaze. Vashtorr roared in exhilaration before channelling the excess energies back through his hammer and hurling an infernal plasma comet at his attackers. The detonation blasted them from their feet. Some, armour melted and flesh burning, did not rise again.

The siren song from beyond the obsidian gates drew Vashtorr ever onward. He saw the beings who fought so tenaciously to stop him as but impediments, irksome equations to be reduced to a sum of zero and then bypassed. He issued a blurt of scrapcode, momentarily slaving the Soul Grinders amidst his forces and compelling them to vomit a concerted bombardment into the midst of the loyalist defences. As the Dark Angels dived aside and bunched up beyond the blast range, so the Arkifane triggered a plague of malfunctions and overloads amongst their wargear that saw grenades detonate, power packs erupt and blazing loyalist corpses tossed through the air.

Closer Vashtorr strode to his prize, and closer still as daemons flitted around him to hurl themselves upon the Dark Angels with howls of glee and hunger. Fighting raged behind the barricades as the Space Marines stubbornly refused to give ground. Malevolent horrors reached through their armour to crush their organs, vomited corrosive slime across them and hacked at them with bestial ferocity, but still the Dark Angels fought on. Librarian Ezekiel stood atop a mound of rubble and corpses at the centre of the straining loyalist battle-line. He reached out and unleashed a thunderbolt of psychic power that leapt from one daemon to the next, banishing them in bursts of sulphurous flame.

The Arkifane grunted with irritation and rounded upon the Dark Angels Librarian. Before he could unleash his powers, however, Vashtorr was struck by a salvo of bolt shells that blew sparking gobbets of flesh and torn wiring from his body.

Vashtorr wheeled to see Azrael striding toward him, blasting away with the Lion's Wrath. Green-armoured warriors advanced alongside their lord, a proud banner fluttering in their midst while Terminator battle-brothers anchored their flanks. Rolling his shoulders as steam vented from his internal workings, Vashtorr growled a curse upon faulty mortal allies and causal reality-lag. He threw back his head and gave vent to a thunderous scrapcode roar that invaded the loyalists' vox network even as it sent fully half the daemons surging toward the newly arrived foe. The Arkifane rose into the air amidst a crackling storm of energy and billowing smog, then swept down on Azrael with his hammer swinging.

The battle before the Nameless Gate exploded into new heights of savagery. Bolters thundered; chainswords struck sparks from blazing helblades; leaping flames lit scenes of butchery as warp entities ripped and tore at their victims. With their vox flooded by Vashtorr's looping howl, many Dark Angels were forced to tear off their helms before they were driven mad. Librarian Ezekiel fought on amidst a tide of foes, hacking and hurling bolts of power as he bellowed exhortations to his warriors. Master Lazarus fought with his back pressed to the obsidian gates, a last handful of battle-brothers battling shoulder to shoulder with him against the daemons. Amidst it all, the Arkifane duelled the Supreme Grand Master. Azrael was a superlative warrior with centuries of experience and skill, but his newly augmented body had not yet healed from its dramatic surgeries. Vashtorr, meanwhile, was a timeless and tireless horror of the warp, a daemon demigod goaded to fury by the nearness of his prize. As the Arkifane's onslaught intensified, even the proud artificer systems of Azrael's relic wargear began to spark and seize. The daemon's hammer rose and fell like an industrial piston, clashing against the Sword of Secrets again and again. To his horror, Azrael realised too late that this was a fight he could not, in this moment, win.

*'Fury, brothers! Righteous outrage! Let them be the strength in your arm and the steel in your spine. This far they come, sons of the Lion, and not a step further. Stand as firm as does the mighty Rock itself, and know that if you give your lives in battle this day you shall do as great a duty for your Chapter in your sacrifice as any warrior ever has in the name of a righteous cause. Fight, sons of the Lion! Fight!'*

- Librarian Ezekiel, exhortations before the Nameless Gate

## HEX PENUMBRA

Thundering through the void, the Rock drew ever closer to Marwent's Reach. Storms of munitions continued to whip back and forth between the battered fortress and its equally mauled attackers. A belt of drifting wreckage and slain fighter craft tumbled in the gravity wake of the duelling void craft. Within the strategium of the Tower of Angels, Master Belial fought to hold his post as he heard the increasingly desperate state of the battles raging through and atop the Rock. Vox messages crackled in from the loyalist warships around Marwent's Reach; the Imperial vessels were even now firing their thrusters as they powered out to come to the Dark Angels' aid. Yet it sounded to Belial as though the Supreme Grand Master and his comrades – not to mention many others of the Chapter besides them – would not live to see help arrive.

It was in the moment that Belial decided to enter the fight himself, and damn his orders, that the Rock passed through an invisible curtain of energy. Vox chatter was momentarily eclipsed by a susurrus of whispering voices. Warriors and serfs alike faltered as shadows passed before their eyes, with more than one combatant either slain as a consequence of their momentary blindness or else spared their enemies' killing blows by the same phenomenon. Every lumen on the Rock winked out as one, with those that sputtered back to life rendered dim and throwing weird shadows that seemed too deep and dark. Guessing that something supernatural had just transpired, and certain that it could not presage anything good, Belial left others in charge of the strategium. Gathering his retinue of Deathwing Knights, he strode out to join the fight.

Vashtorr, too, felt the premonition of unholy powers at work. Unlike the Dark Angels, however, he was all too aware that whatever was happening, it was none of his doing. The Arkifane's attention was captured for a crucial moment, his focus interrupted as his instinctive curiosity drove him to send tendrils of his psyche questing out through vid-feeds and auspex in search of the cause of the penumbral phenomena. This was all the opportunity a warrior as veteran as Azrael needed to break away from his foe and retreat. Vashtorr was torn back to the moment by a fresh salvo from the Lion's Wrath, which scorched a deep crater in his corporeal shell and staggered him back. Psyche fractured, the Arkifane growled a curse in a long-dead machine language and stalked after his retreating foe. Before he could bring Azrael to battle again, however, an unnatural gale rose from nowhere to scream through the gallerium.

Light swelled suddenly on high as the lumen set behind the stained glass panels whined, then detonated to leave behind darkness and a tumbling rain of shattered glass shards. Suddenly the battle before the Nameless Gate was lit by nothing but leaping flames, muzzle flare and those lumen packs that had not detonated at the same time the lights blew out on high.

Now the madly dancing shadows writhed like living things. Vashtorr paused, scanning warily about as he perceived currents of empyric energy slithering through the gloom. There came a sighing as of a cold wind blowing through headstones upon some lonely and desolate hilltop. The forlorn sound swelled again and again, each time from a different direction, and as it did so Vashtorr saw penumbral portals whirling open in the fabric of reality. Through them came Space Marines clad in dark robes and heavy cowls. Vashtorr saw some amongst the Dark Angels stiffen as their lumen beams fell upon the newcomers, and he heard the word 'Fallen' flicker through several, highly encrypted vox channels.

Then the newcomers threw back their hoods and Vashtorr felt unholy fury grip him as he saw the armour of Word Bearers and Alpha Legion Chaos Space Marines revealed. Yet even as the new arrivals opened fire indiscriminately into loyalists and invading daemons alike, it was not their sudden appearance or interference with his plan that filled Vashtorr with rage. It was the daemonic shadowmark that he perceived wrought into the newcomers' wargear and bound about their very living souls. It was the mark of Be'lakor, the Dark Master.

Utter bedlam erupted through the Gallerium Exactor as the battle devolved into a tripartite slaughter. Fresh waves of daemons sprang from the shadowy portals, these bearing no marks of indenture to the soul forges. They fell upon their rival entities in Vashtorr's service, and many daemons tumbled back into the warp as they ripped one another apart in savage battles of mutual destruction. Vashtorr felt – through his tech-attuned senses – the Dark Angels rallying amidst the mayhem. They employed the degenerating situation as a chance to exchange fresh orders, disengage from suddenly-distracted foes, and marshal their remaining strength before the Nameless Gate. He stood frozen by momentary indecision as complex mechanisms and strategic schemata assembled and unravelled before his mind's eye. Vashtorr could see his prize suddenly receding from reach, his forces hard-pressed not only here but all through the Rock by these new arrivals. If he did not act now, he realised, his plans would collapse into ruin.

### THE AEGIS

One by one the Master of the Forge had isolated the foul scrapcode daemons infesting the Gorgon's Aegis. One by one he had purged them, though it had ravaged him in body and mind to overthrow them. At the same time, a slowly dwindling band of Dark Angels battle-brothers had held the corridors and walkways leading to the generator shrine against waves of Vashtorr's followers. Baying cultists, grotesque tech-mutants, hard-bitten Black Legionnaires and even the supernatural horrors of the warp; all had hurled themselves at the stoic defenders and been cut down in turn. Yet they had inflicted terrible casualties amongst the defenders, the last handful of whom now clung to their positions through bloody-minded determination alone. Stony-faced, their commanding Sergeant voxed the labouring Tech-Marines to warn them that, if they did not raise the shield now, they would not live to do so at all. Yet even as the heretics massed for their final charge, the shadows about them shifted strangely and dark figures stepped forth with bolters raised. The Dark Angels watched in amazement as heretic slaughtered heretic. Here, perhaps, lay salvation unlooked for.

*Vashtorr strode toward the Nameless Gate.* He would smash a path through the remaining Dark Angels alone if he had to. Before he could reach them, however, the shadows writhed and thickened around him. The Arkifane felt hostile power envelop him. He sensed contempt and infinite duplicity rushing like currents through the penumbral energies and tasted bitter poison. Mocking laughter flitted around him as the Gallerium Exactor vanished behind a mass of shadow.

Vashtorr uttered a string of machine-code oaths as he sought to break free from the malefic conjuration. He loosed a storm of infernal motive force that blasted shadows to tatters. He slammed his hammer against the flagstones beneath his feet and summoned buried cables and wires that burst up through them to strike like serpents at the coiling darkness.

The mocking laughter turned to an affronted growl, low, wet and rumbling as that of some colossal hunting cat denied its prey. The shadows writhed inward with redoubled force, twining about one another into coiling ropes that lashed around Vashtorr's limbs, his body, and even looped about his neck like a hempen noose. Slashing wires and blasts of energy severed one rope after another and sent their frayed ends tattering away as ashes. Vashtorr's eyes blazed and the industrial glare momentarily drove back the darkness that crowded in on him. Yet more and more ropes slithered from the gloom.

Belatedly, Vashtorr drew back those parts of his mind that had continued to obsessively observe the strategic situation through vox and auspex networks. He cursed himself for his compulsion to maintain a grip upon the wider strategic situation at such a time, realising it had robbed him of the immediacy and focus he needed to stave off this onslaught. He suspected that he knew the name of his unseen assailant, and thought they must be bending all of their considerable power to this attack.

As shadows entombed him and dragged him into the waiting abyss, the Arkifane reflected bitterly that this was not the first time his compulsion to see and understand all had been his undoing.

Vashtorr expected banishment, yet instead the light and solidity of realspace bloomed about him again. The ground was hard under his hooves, the light stark as it spilled from the countless stars speckling the dark void above. He had not been attacked, he realised, but rather summoned to the surface of the Rock.

'*The vainglorious fool wishes to gloat!*' he exclaimed.

Vashtorr took in the Tower of Angels looming ahead of him, and the firestorms and wrecks that marked the ongoing battles between his dug-in followers and the Dark Angels' armour formations. He saw the vast shape of the *Orac Unleashed* hanging high overhead. Vashtorr did not need his warpsight to know that the Ark of Omen had been sorely mauled in its ongoing duel with the Rock. Yet the vessel fought on with the cold cunning of the Abominable Intelligence that inhabited it, inflicting yet more damage on the battered Rock.

The Arkifane's warp senses warned him of fresh shadow portals opening across the surface of the Rock. He growled at the sight of more robed Word Bearers and Alpha Legionnaires emerging, supported by Daemon Engines and battle tanks. Even more disturbing was the sight of Chaos Knights clad in the penumbral livery of Be'lakor's worshippers, striding from writhing portals to join the attack. Some turned their guns on old Aldurukh, or the Dark Angels' tanks. Others assaulted Vashtorr's own beleaguered forces.

'No, not to gloat, but to humble one who needs reminding of their lowly place in the pantheon,' came a rumbling voice from behind Vashtorr.

He turned to see shadows coalescing into a towering figure whose vast wings blotted out the star field. Be'lakor the Dark Master manifested from abyssal darkness and even Vashtorr could not help but admire the sheer infernal majesty of this first amongst Daemon Princes.

'*Well would it have been, once-mortal, for you to leave my labours here unimpeded,*' said Vashtorr.

'You are the lickspittle of the Despoiler,' growled Be'lakor. 'Appropriate, perhaps, that the oilgrub king of soot and scraps should serve as a mere tool in a mortal's hand. Yet you are not without your greater uses. I commend your labours in sabotaging the shield that warded this sad remnant of a place.'

'*No benefit to one such as you was my intent, assured be,*' spat Vashtorr. Even as he spoke, he sent scrapcode imperatives squirming out through the battle station, summoning all those of his followers that he could to his aid.

'And after I worked so hard in so many ways to ensure this meeting took place,' said Be'lakor. 'Wounding.'

'*A spiteful thing you are, with little purpose and less wit,*' said Vashtorr.

'My purpose here is to remind you which daemon deity holds power over the mortals, which of us dangles the Despoiler on a thread, and then to send you back to lurk amidst your cogs,' said Be'lakor. With that, he launched himself to the attack.

# DAEMON CLASH

**Summoned to the surface of the Rock by Be'lakor's shadow sorcery, Vashtorr was now forced to do battle with the Dark Master in person. Without the guidance of the Arkifane, and with a third, mutually antagonistic force suddenly on the attack, Vashtorr's invaders were driven into a desperate fight for survival. Meanwhile, the Dark Angels rallied back to the attack.**

What had been a hard-fought battle between invaders and defenders now became a three-way cauldron of violence that threatened to descend into outright anarchy. Be'lakor's disciples appeared to have no agenda beyond indiscriminate violence and destruction. Armed with the element of surprise and cloaked by the supernatural gloom with which Be'lakor had flooded much of the Rock, they struck and faded at will. For the Dark Angels, many of whom were already dug into defensive positions and who possessed intimate knowledge of the environs in which they fought, these attacks could be repulsed, albeit at a bloody cost. They spelled disaster for many invading warbands, however. Some of Vashtorr's forces found themselves pinned between loyalists to the fore and suddenly manifested Heretic Astartes foes behind. Others mistook enemy for ally in the confusion and were ruthlessly gunned down by those they believed comrades. Cut off in hostile territory, outflanked and surrounded, Vashtorr's boarding parties suffered heavy losses.

Those who could answered their master's scrapcode summons. Abandoning efforts to push deeper into the Rock, they instead blasted bloody paths through loyalist and disciple forces alike as they sought to rally to the Arkifane's side. Some succeeded, bursting from hatches or

*During the murderous war in the Charadon Sub-sector, Be'lakor had engineered the downfall and warp-borne theft of Kolossi, the home world of House Raven. Those scions of that house that he stole away became the first corrupted warriors of House Korvax, and the oath-sworn foes of Princeps Grevan and his surviving loyalists. Their very existence was a stain upon the honour of House Raven that could not be borne.*

emerging through sub-tunnels to join the fight upon the airless, rocky plain. Others fell as they tried to fight their way out.

Even as the battle raging on the surface of the Rock intensified, so the fighting within its depths changed in nature. Where before Azrael and his defence forces had been hard-pressed, now they were able to consolidate their positions and regain the strategic momentum. With Vashtorr ripped unceremoniously out onto the battle station's surface and his attention captured by his daemonic foe, his assault upon the loyalists' vox net ceased. Supreme Grand Master Azrael's voice rang out through the vox, pained but filled with cold fury. He reminded the Dark Angels of the oaths they had sworn to Chapter and Emperor, to fight to their last breath in defence of all they held sacred and to purge the heretic without mercy. He commanded that they fulfil those oaths once again this day by hunting down every single traitor and abomination whose presence sullied the halls of the Rock and expunging their foulness to the last. Filled with a desire to avenge themselves on those who had so savagely defiled the very heart of their Chapter, the Dark Angels advanced with the merciless precision and determination for which they were so feared.

## MASTER AND ARKIFANE

Vashtorr might have applied himself to the wider strategic situation, had he been spared the energy and focus. He would have sought to extract as many of his mortal followers as possible from the closing jaws of the Dark Angels' vengeance, or even to coordinate one last bypassing strike to reach his prize.

Instead, he was forced to defend his corporeal form from Be'lakor's onslaught. The Dark Master swung his Blade of Shadows with meteoric force and Vashtorr brought up his hammer to parry, only for Be'lakor and his blade to vanish in a whirl of shadows. Vashtorr wheeled, hunting for his opponent through energistic and empyric spectra. He caught a flicker in several low-light and warp-sensitive registers and span in time to block his suddenly materialising foe's strike. The Blade of Shadows could pass through any physical impediment, but such was Vashtorr's daemonic will and command of the matter of realspace that he was able to block its swing. The Arkifane enjoyed a moment's grim satisfaction at the outrage twisting Be'lakor's monstrous visage.

His pleasure was short-lived, as the Dark Master burst into a cyclonic storm of shadows that whirled around Vashtorr, and from which his blade licked out again and again. Be'lakor's taunts slithered through Vashtorr's mind in an overlapping river of mocking whispers intended to distract and enrage. The Arkifane felt his corporeal shell torn by Be'lakor's blade, then ruptured again by a vicious stab to the chest. Vashtorr understood the mechanisms of his own infinitely complex manifestation well, and knew that his form could not continue to suffer punishment of this sort without discorporating. Fury flared within him like a blazing forge at the thought of being unceremoniously hurled back into the warp by the Daemon Prince who had already sabotaged his plans. He would not allow it.

Reaching out with his techno-arcane powers, Vashtorr bled energy from the void shields still shimmering around the Tower of Angels. With a thought he fashioned them into a temporary shield dome that he reinforced with his own infernal animus. The next blow of Be'lakor's blade rebounded from Vashtorr's shield and the Dark Master hissed his displeasure. Complex calculations raced through Vashtorr's mind swifter than any targeting cogitator could have managed. He reached out again and snatched a salvo of missiles even as they streaked overhead, re-targeting them with terrible precision. One after another the plasma warheads rained down around the warring daemon lords. Their detonations flared like miniature stars and blasted glassy black craters with each impact. Be'lakor's shadowy form flickered and danced as he sought to evade the plummeting ordnance, before reforming in a clear space amidst the bombardment. It was a gap that Vashtorr had left deliberately, and into which he swung his hammer just as Be'lakor manifested there. The blow landed under the Daemon Prince's jaw and lifted him off his feet amidst an inky fountain of ichor. Vashtorr allowed himself a grunt of satisfaction and stalked after his foe.

In the next instant the Arkifane found himself blinded by absolute darkness. He roared in frustration and took several wild swings, vox-projecting curses at Be'lakor for fouling plans that had been mortal centuries in the making. The Dark Master answered him with mocking mirth and a vicious blade-strike that plunged up through the small of Vashtorr's back and erupted from his throat. In response, the Arkifane vented infernal energies like an overheated plasma reactor and heard Be'lakor hiss in pain, reeling back and ripping his blade free. The flare of ectoplasma burned away the supernatural darkness with which Vashtorr had been blinded, and he turned to face his foe again.

To his consternation, Vashtorr saw that – though Be'lakor's corporeal vessel was scorched and battered – the Dark Master wore a knowing smirk. Be'lakor mocked Vashtorr

for his inability to understand the far-reaching implications of his intervention here, calling him a stunted would-be god. Besides, Be'lakor continued, none of Vashtorr's plans mattered now for they were all undone. The mortals would restore their shield all too soon, for his own disciples had driven off those of Vashtorr's followers sent to hamper the Dark Angels' labours. Meanwhile, Vashtorr's time had run out. For proof, Be'lakor bade his foe simply look to the stars. Vashtorr, realising now that his empyric tech-senses were tingling a warning of their own, kept his eyes on Be'lakor but sent tendrils of awareness questing into vid-feeds and auspexes aimed into the void. He tasted ashes as he saw the Imperial warships even now closing in upon the Rock from the direction of Marwent's Reach. Loyalist reinforcements were about to strike, and there was nothing now he could do to prevent them.

## TASK FORCE XII

Be'lakor's disciples had abandoned the battle on Marwent's Reach prior to their raid upon the Rock. They had faded back into the shadows and left their cultist followers and turncoat militiamen to face the full wrath of the planet's defenders. Be'lakor had spirited his mortal elites through the empyrean and employed sinister sorcery to deploy them in battle against the Dark Angels and Vashtorr's followers.

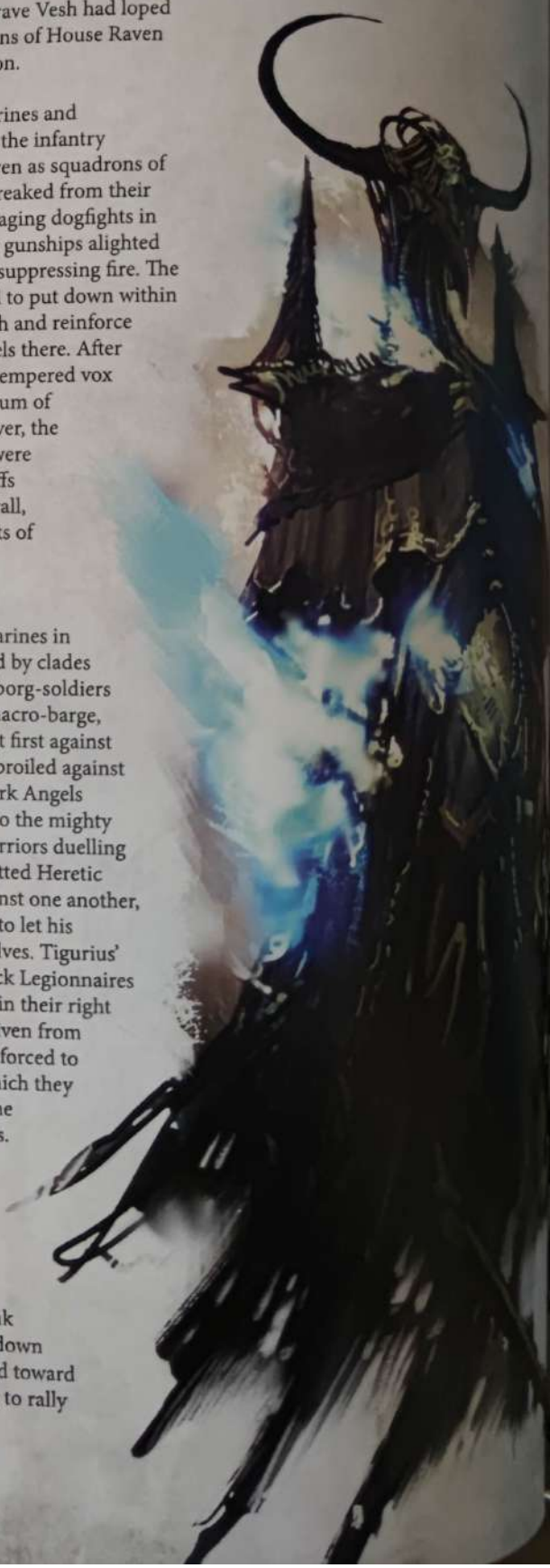
At the same time, Varro Tigurius and his fellow task force commanders had responded to the distress calls from the Rock with all the force and speed they could muster. Now, even as the impetus of Be'lakor's initial strike faded, the void ships of Task Force XII of Battle Group Hephaestus arrived to land another telling blow against Vashtorr's plans. It was, broadly speaking, just as the Dark Master had intended.

What he had reckoned without, however, was the vehemence with which the Imperial reinforcements would pursue his own warriors. As heavy landers and drop craft thundered in to deposit loyalist warriors upon the surface of the Rock, a lance of House Raven Knights made straight for their counterparts of House Korvax. The Chaos Knights had split their forces. Half were relentlessly bombarding the void shields of the Tower of Angels, while seeing off increasingly desperate assaults by Dark Angels tanks and aircraft as the shields flickered ever closer to collapse. The other half had gone hunting, and had wracked up a fearsome tally of both loyalist and Iron Warriors armour kills.

The former group had barely time to react before the Knights of Raven were upon them. Princeps Grevan personally slew a towering traitor Knight Tyrant, raking it with firepower from behind before smashing his crippled foe onto its face with devastating force. The Knight Tyrant died in a string of convulsive explosions as the Princeps' vengeful war cries rang across the vox. More House Korvax Knights from the bombardment lance fell as they tried to turn and address the onrushing loyalist war engines, or as the House Raven drop craft thundered low overhead blitzing laser fire and volleys of rockets into the traitors. By the time the House Korvax hunting party led by Margrave Vesh had loped in to join the fight, the scions of House Raven held a commanding position.

At the same time, Ultramarines and Novamarines spearheaded the infantry offensive onto the Rock. Even as squadrons of Stormhawk Interceptors streaked from their launch cradles to join the raging dogfights in the void, so waves of heavy gunships alighted while laying down hails of suppressing fire. The Novamarines were charged to put down within the bounds of old Aldurukh and reinforce the beleaguered Dark Angels there. After a string of increasingly ill-tempered vox exchanges with the strategium of the Tower of Angels, however, the nonplussed Novamarines were redirected to the rocky bluffs beyond Aldurukh's outer wall, there to support the Knights of House Raven.

Chief Librarian Tigurius, meanwhile, led his Ultramarines in the main assault. Supported by clades of Adeptus Mechanicus cyborg-soldiers deployed from a hulking macro-barge, Tigurius focused his assault first against the Black Legionnaires embroiled against the primary strength of Dark Angels armour. He was not blind to the mighty daemon lords and their warriors duelling nearby, but as their fight pitted Heretic Astartes and daemons against one another, the Librarian was inclined to let his enemies annihilate themselves. Tigurius' force struck the dug in Black Legionnaires like a thunderbolt, staving in their right flank. The heretics were driven from one position after another, forced to relinquish ground from which they had successfully repelled the Dark Angels multiple times. Pushed out onto the open plain south of their landing zones, the Black Legionnaires were at the mercy of the mauled – but vengeful – Dark Angels tank squadrons. Those not run down or blasted apart made speed toward Vashtorr's position, hoping to rally



## VOID WAR

Though the Orac Balefleet had initially surprised the Dark Angels and done much harm to their void ships, the cunning commands of Master Sammael had gradually turned the void war around. By the time that the reinforcements from Task Force XII assaulted the Rock, Sammael's own vessel had claimed no less than four enemy warship kills, while the rest of his scattered fleet had accounted for many more traitor vessels.

*Be'lakor is reputed to be a jealous and spiteful entity, who resents any power or favour held by any whom he perceives to be his rivals.*

with those Heretic Astartes now spilling up from below to answer their master's summons.

## PURGATION

Though he still had forces in the field, Be'lakor had launched his attack with substantially less warriors than either of his foes and his numerical disadvantage was now worsening by the moment. Yet the Dark Master had never sought a military conquest aboard the Rock. He had sprung his trap in order to humble Vashtorr and ruin his plans, giving at least the appearance of doing so for the sake of spite and jealousy. Although he had not banished the Arkifane, he had fouled the strategic situation beyond even Vashtorr's ability to recover. Seeing his work done and his enemies closing in, Be'lakor gathered his might to plunge back into the shadows with his surviving disciples.

Feeling sorcerous energies gathering, Vashtorr launched one last furious attack upon his tormentor. The Arkifane seized control of dozens of machine spirits, his scrapcode tendrils dragging the barrels of tank guns, war engine weapon systems and emplaced batteries about to point at Be'lakor and his forces. In the instant before the Dark Master was able to complete his incantation, Vashtorr unleashed a firestorm of apocalyptic proportions.

Knights of Houses Korvax and Raven alike staggered, their ion shields blowing out in showers of sparks before the huge war engines toppled and burned. Robed Heretic Astartes were atomised by the impact of tank-busting ordnance that converged upon them from every direction. Even Be'lakor himself could not entirely avoid the onslaught, and as he vanished into the shadows he did so with a howl of rage, his mortal shell rent and cratered by a score of punishing impacts.

And then, like smoke in a gale, the Disciples of Be'lakor were spirited away. On the Rock's surface, Princeps Grevan and his followers howled their fury as not only their surviving foes but also the fallen Chaos Knight steeds of the vanquished heretics disappeared from sight. Throughout the body-strewn galleries and burning, bolt-cratered corridors of the Rock the disciples faded into the shadows and were gone.

Dark Angels, many wounded or reduced to fighting with knives and gun butts, exchanged wary glances as they scanned for their vanished foes. There had been enough malicious surprises and dishonourable strategies that day to make them slow to believe their foes had truly retreated. Yet as one squad after another reported their defensive sector was purged of foes, it became increasingly apparent that one enemy force, at least, truly had been driven off.

The Dark Angels' full fury now came to bear against Vashtorr's surviving followers, augmented by that of the newly arrived Imperial reinforcements. No longer did the traitors fight to seize an ancient and vital treasure. Now they battled only to survive. Bands of ancient warriors who had preyed upon Humanity for hundreds, even thousands of years were trapped upon stone stairways or within shadowy chambers and either slain or subdued and taken prisoner. The last of the daemonic entities that Vashtorr had unleashed within the Rock were sent howling back to the warp by bolt, blast and blade. The taint they had left within the Dark Angels fortress monastery would take far longer to expunge, but they would spread no more death or destruction that day.

On the surface, Vashtorr knew that all was lost. Infernal fury gripped him as he beheld the ruin of plans long laid. Worse, without that which he had come to claim, the Arkifane would not be able to complete the Key nor conclude his bargain with the Despoiler. Yet as Imperial Knights, wrathful Space Marines and battle tanks closed in around him he applied himself first to his more immediate problems.

At his scrapcode command, those heretic warships left in the system converged upon the Rock not to attack but to extract what forces they could from beneath the hammering guns of their enemies. Ancient and malevolent Stormbirds dared the loyalists' fire to swoop down and snatch away handfuls of Black Legionnaires, Iron Warriors and Word Bearers from the battle on the surface, or from their precarious footholds on embarkation decks.

Precious few traitors would be rescued in this fashion. Yet Vashtorr was not a wasteful being. Moreover, he appreciated that returning to his mortal ally with some warriors still alive was preferable to reporting a complete massacre.

Vashtorr himself did not remain to oversee the desperate evacuation. Seething with fury he seized control of an archaic teleportation array aboard the *Orac Unleashed* and translocated himself back aboard the battered Ark of Omen.

Blazing from stem to stern, kept from destruction only by esoteric defence systems that had been pushed to their very limits, the *Orac Unleashed* fired all thrusters and powered away from the Rock. Several loyalist void ships attempted to prevent the Ark's escape. Smaller and lighter as they were, they could only pummel the vessel with their broadsides as it swept them aside. Pursued toward the Mandeville point by what heretic ships had survived the scattered void war, the *Orac Unleashed* bore Vashtorr away in defeat.

## THE UNFORGIVEN

The aftermath of Vashtorr's assault against the Rock was messy and drawn out. The tunnels of the Fortress Monastery delved deep and labyrinthine, offering hiding places for the increasingly desperate scattering of heretics still trapped within. One by one the Dark Angels located their quarry and put an end to their freedom, and often their lives. Heretic Astartes were dragged in chains to cells normally reserved for the Dark Angels' own Fallen brethren. Though they did not know it yet, the Chaos worshippers would soon endure horrors beyond even their twisted imaginings at the hands of the Interrogator Chaplains. Supreme Grand Master Azrael was beyond fury at the events that had transpired. He wanted answers as to the heretics' plans, the nature of the daemon that had led them, and all they knew about the Rock and its secrets.

Meanwhile, he dealt coldly with those who offered aid. Though Tigurius, Grevan and their comrades were thanked and honoured by the Dark Angels, they were also told in no uncertain terms to leave at once. The pretext was that the Gorgon's Aegis was now ready to be raised anew, and doing so would trap the loyalist complements aboard. Yet the request was lent subtle menace by the return of the scattered Dark Angels ships, which converged at full combat speed from across the system now that their heretic enemies had fled.

Grevan, and the Novamarines' Captain Lyonne, were both outraged at this heavy-handed snub. Chief Librarian Tigurius had experience of the Dark Angels and their secretive ways, however, and believed that he saw a mixture of deep disquiet and wounded pride behind Azrael's stony facade. He graciously acceded to the Supreme Grand Master's demands, pulling his forces off the Rock without delay and retracting those offers of aid from Tech-Priests and Techmarines that had been extended. The Dark Angels would affect their own repairs and tend to their own wounds. They would keep their own counsel with regards to the strange and horrific events of this day, and any quest for vengeance they might embark upon they would pursue alone.

Only once all loyalist reinforcements had turned and headed back for Marwent's Reach did Azrael order the Gorgon's Aegis restored. Then, with its mauled fleet formed up around it, the Rock retreated to the deep void. The battle was won, or at least survived, but for the Dark Angels this matter was far from over.

*Dherga hung in total darkness.* Even his unnaturally sharp eyesight was confounded by so complete an absence of light. He had surmised his cell had been diligently designed to blind even Space Marine senses. The chains by which he was bound cruciform to the rough wet stone of the wall had also proven more than a match for post-human strength. Such details had raised questions for Dherga during the early days of his captivity. Yet as the days crawled past, and sensory deprivation clashed with sensory overload, and the damp of the cell crept into his flesh, his curiosity had dulled. As the unremitting drag of his own heavily muscled body worked slow torture upon his arms and back Dherga had ceased to care about the Dark Angels' secrets. Starvation took far longer for one of the Heretic Astartes than it did for a mortal, yet in the end even he was not immune to its ravages. Nor could he endure indefinitely the slow festering of his wounds or the turgid curdling of a mind trapped in a void-dark box.

Then there were the visits of his interrogator, kept carefully irregular, commencing most times with a shocking barrage of blinding light and deafening white noise projected from concealed voxponders. Dherga came to both dread and long for the awful stimuli of each fresh interrogation. Each time allowed him to prove to his captors that his hatred for them still burned strong. Yet each time also brought him incrementally closer to wishing he knew the right answers to satisfy their curiosity once and for all. Any end would be preferable to this interminable purgatory.

Dherga's sluggish thoughts shattered like glass as the lumen blasted him with their glare and a roar of static caused his ravaged body to fill with adrenaline. He thrashed weakly. He thought he snarled, but it was hard to tell amidst the din. The sound cut out as suddenly as it had begun, but the lights continued to flood his skull even through closed eyelids.

'How did you know where the Rock would be?'

Dherga didn't know when his interrogator had entered the chamber. The Dark Angel was simply there, a hulking silhouette against the glare.

'The daemon knew,' he snarled. The questions were familiar to him, learned by rote so that he could have answered them in advance had he known the order in which they would come.

'How was the Gorgon's Aegis disabled?'

'The daemon. The daemon made a weapon. I have told you – '

Pain tore through him like wildfire. Dherga had long given up attempting to determine where it came from or how it was administered. He knew only that it felt each time as though his insides were being scoured with jagged glass and acid.

'Why did you attack us?'

'To burn your accursed Chapter and all its – '

Pain roared through him again.

'Why did you attack us?'

'Because you are corpse-worshipping vermin who – '

Again, agony.

'Why did you attack us?'

'Fine, you cur-son,' spat Dherga, blood and spittle running from his lips. 'As I have told you, we came for the device, the one the daemon coveted.'

'What is the device?'

'I don't know.'

The pain lasted longer this time, wracking Dherga until he writhed and howled, then hung gasping in its wake.

'What is the device?'

'I do not know,' he wheezed, loathing how broken he sounded.

'What is the nature of the daemon?'

'They call it the Arkifane, Vashtorr. It has allied itself to the Warmaster. It is a thing of engines and of cogs, I know no more, but that I loathe the damned thing. The Despoiler would never have abandoned me in this nest of vermin.'

Dherga braced for pain but none was forthcoming. Its absence had become as jarring as its onset.

'Where is the daemon now?' asked the interrogator. Dherga opened his mouth to explain, wearily and for the hundredth time that he did not know. He froze in surprise. The information was there, poised behind his lips as though eager to be voiced.

'It... the Somnium Stars. The daemon has fled back to the Somnium Stars.'

Pain exploded through him.

'Is this a trick?' asked his interrogator.

'No, no!' gasped Dherga. 'It is in the Somnium Stars!'

'That is no small region,' said the interrogator. 'Give me specifics.

Dherga found that he could, and felt no inclination to

keep the answers to himself. He told all that he knew. He hoped it might be enough to bring an end to his suffering even though part of him knew it would not.

Minutes later, Interrogator-Chaplain Zacharus sealed the door to the heretic's cell and left him in darkness again. Stashing the heavy iron keys within his robes, he turned to Asmodai who waited in the corridor.

'The heretic said the same as the others,' he reported. Asmodai nodded gravely, expression hidden by his ornate face-plate.

'Where has this sudden knowledge come from, and where the sudden eagerness to impart it?' he mused.

'It must be reported to the Supreme Grand Master,' said Zacharus.

'And yet it must be wondered at also, for does this not have the ring of the supernatural about it?' said Asmodai. 'If it is the lure for a trap, it is a strange and unsubtle one.'

'Nevertheless,' said Zacharus.

'Nevertheless,' echoed Asmodai in agreement. 'I will bear this revelation to Lord Azrael that he might decide what is to be done with it.'

*Abaddon the Despoiler swung Drach'nyen and lopped the head from another blade-armed cyborg.* The creature toppled amidst a spray of oily blood and motive force. Abaddon stepped on it as he pressed ahead, crushing the cog design emblazoned there into the collapsing chest-cavity.

More soldiers of the Adeptus Mechanicus lunged at him with their transonic blades thrumming and he slew them each in turn. The Despoiler was in a foul mood, and not to be delayed by such half-human impediments as these.

Bursting through a gold-chased arch, Abaddon found himself overlooking a vast cogitator pit wreathed in sacred incense. Hunched tech-adepts peered up at him from their stations. Elite Skitarii clattered along gantries, firing their rifles at him as they came. Abaddon raised the Talon of Horus and let fly, even as his Black Legionnaires spilled through the arch at his back and joined the fray.

'Leave none alive!' roared Abaddon. 'Heap their carcasses in the pit.'

The servants of the Omnissiah fought with all the zeal of fanatics defending a site sacred to their god. Yet all their cyborg might and hardwired faith could not match the ancient cunning and fury of the Warmaster and his veteran killers.

So it was that, mere minutes after he had led his speartip into the heart of the Tech-Priests' shrine, Abaddon stood upon a gantry overlooking a pit filled to the brim with the flesh, blood and sparking machinery of its defenders. He glanced at those of his own warriors who had fallen and curled his lip.

'This has cost me, daemon,' he muttered. 'It had best be worth the time and lives.' Abaddon gestured to the cabal of sorcerers who waited around the rim of the pit. They began chanting, swaying and scattering ichor from spiked censers as they worked their infernal seance.

The air crackled with dark power, thickening until it felt as though a malefic thunderstorm were about to erupt at the chamber's heart. Within the pit, the charnel heap of ruined machinery and butchered flesh heaved. Worms of copper and silver writhed through the vast mass, leaving brass threads behind themselves as they chewed and squirmed.

Even Abaddon was not above a grimace of disgust at the sound made by the profusion of flesh and metal as it surged upward. Sparks drizzled from the churning mass. Gore splattered the gantry and the reek of cooking flesh rolled over Abaddon as a rudimentary face formed amidst the foulness. One eye was formed from a huge lumen dome, the other from hundreds of clustered ocular augmetics. Its open maw was fanged with jagged spars of broken cogitator and transonic blade.

'*Abaddon the Despoiler*,' said Vashtorr, his voice a blood-wet rumble. '*Come you before me to account for the actions of the once-mortal*? *Am I to believe you have muzzled the lurking mongrel for its misdeeds*?'

Abaddon scowled. He had long known that permitting Be'lakor within his inner circle of lieutenants was a gamble. Better to have such a duplicitous being close than leave him free to run amok. He had his own plans for Be'lakor's punishment, but he resented Vashtorr's accusatory tone.

'There will be an accounting for Be'lakor, Arkifane. It shall be at a time of my choosing and in a manner I orchestrate. I am not your servant. You are a part of my plans, not the master of them. I would be more cautious in my tone of address, had I failed as you have to deliver upon your promises.'

'*Not one of your lackeys, am I, to be commanded thus*,' growled Vashtorr.

'One of my champions would not have failed so spectacularly to seize the prize from aboard the Rock,' said Abaddon.

'*And yet one of them, it was, who engineered this setback*,' replied the grotesque daemonic avatar. Corpsemeat and shattered circuitry spilled from its malformed lips as it spoke.

'Was it not you in command of the attack? Was it not you who failed to plan for such contingencies?' asked Abaddon. 'I begin to question the vaunted talents of the Arkifane. A poor workman blames his tools, daemon. How is it that your rivals have not overthrown your hold upon the soul forges?'

To Abaddon's surprise this barb was met not with anger, but with a volley of vox-static booms that he realised approximated laughter.

'*You seek to goad me, as though I were a simplistic mortal construct of primitive urges and fleshbound mind-meat. The embodiment of malevolent artifice am I; complexity; creation; experimentation and progress unbound. Blame is but an error to be actioned, time an operational constraint that only one of us here must obey. Sanity is the limitation of mortals that places the detail of my labours wholly beyond the capacity of your mental architecture. Negligible is the advantage you gain in these futile attempts, unfavourable the expenditure of oxygen and energy. I would alter tack, were I you, Warmaster.*'

Abaddon suspected privately that the daemon was more fallible than it protested. He had fought in many sieges, however, and he knew a hopeless escalade when he saw one.

He decided to take the Arkifane's advice and allowed himself a bass chuckle.

'Very well, mighty and all-knowing Vashtorr. How do we improve upon our designs after this setback?'

*'All matters of true import are questions to which many answers connect.'*

'Speak plainly, daemon,' replied Abaddon, unable to keep the ill temper from his voice. The sounds of distant battle were growing closer from elsewhere in the shrine complex, and as yet his expenditures had brought him no information of value. He suspected the Arkifane knew as much and was enjoying testing his patience.

*'Completion of the Key remains our single purpose, that you might have your weapon and I my final apotheosis. We still require as many more Key-fragments as can be secured, and we still lack one of the triumvirate of core mechanisms. Our Arks have now accumulated more than seventy percent of the desired fragments, amongst them a pleasingly high ratio of ritually significant, and thus supernaturally empowered, artefacts. Know you that my labourers toil without rest. Already the Key nears completion in its place of restoration. Those of our Arks still hunting search for fragments of great power that will ensure the Key is as great and terrible a device as can be engineered. As it should be, so all this is.'*

'But without – ' Abaddon caught himself. It would not do to name their missing prize in this loyalist sanctum. He did not know who or what might be listening. 'Without the last of the three, all is wasted effort. The Key will not wake.'

*'Some cogs turn more slowly than others, Warmaster. Some alignments recur.'*

'If you have a point to make, make it. I am drawn back into battle,' spat Abaddon, his patience at an end.

*'Exloaded the required knowledge of the place of restoration, I have, into the minds of those who fell as captives into the hands of the Lion's base progeny. Even now the biomechanisms of their minds release this secret. They are compelled to speak.'*

Abaddon thought quickly, mind racing, weighing the import of the daemon's deed.

'Audacious. Lead the foe to the Key. Have them deliver our final prize in person. Poetic, for an engineer. But what makes you think they will walk into such an obvious trap? Anemic excuses for Space Marines they might be, but they are not such fools.'

*'I have many cogs, mortal. Myriad are my mechanisms. Yet truly it is but a matter of logical cogitation. So audacious, yet so seemingly clumsy a step as this… is it the trap it appears? A double-bluff? Seek we to bring them to the Somnium Stars or to ward them away? They think not of grand plans, seeing already the complexity and engineering expended in my attack upon their stone sanctuary and presuming a sum total that has ended in defeat. Now their thoughts are of vengeance. Now they see a foe fled, one that perhaps knows things he should not. They will not risk my freedom, nor restrain their need to punish my effrontery.'*

'Perhaps,' scowled Abaddon. Something exploded outside the shrine. He glanced over his shoulder to see black smoke boiling through the arch. His warriors slipped out into the fire-lit gloom and the bark of their boltguns rang out.

Abaddon turned back to the daemonic avatar. 'Even if you are right, why would they bring the Rock? Why not simply send warships?'

*'All the better, if they do,'* said Vashtorr. *'I have still the* Orac Myriad. *Its talent for locating the Rock remains undimmed. If they seek to conceal their stone haven, I shall fall upon it while they writhe in the jaws of the trap.'*

'You would have no way of bringing down their shield a second time,' said Abaddon. This, at last, drew a flare of anger from the daemon. The myriad eye lenses blazed with sudden and intense furnace light.

*'I am the warp god of the forges. No device fashioned by mortal hand can I not undo. But it will not come to that. They will guess, too, that I might return. They will clutch their secrets close, keep them in sight and surround them with strength. It is their way. Only be ready, Despoiler. In your linear terms, the end hastens closer.'*

Another explosion bellowed nearby. The shrine shook, and chunks of the ghastly fleshmetal avatar tore away as the sorcerers' concentration wavered. Abaddon wished to interrogate the daemon further, remained unconvinced by its claims, but he was out of time.

'Do your part, daemon, and I will do mine. Do not fail me again.'

The only answer he received was another vox blurt of dark mirth, which distorted into a howl of feedback as the avatar of Vashtorr disintegrated back into the pit in a gory avalanche. Abaddon turned toward the sounds of battle with his thoughts whirling.

Would Vashtorr uphold his end of their bargain? Could the Key truly be fashioned and used as his unholy ally claimed? Would the final onslaughts of the Arks into Ultramar, the Damocles Gulf, Ultima Macharia and the Medusan Reach yield the rewards of supernatural power they promised?

As had so often been the case in his Long War, Abaddon had to trust in his agents, his followers and his inconstant allies.

With a snarl, the Despoiler strode towards the battle. He was all too ready to vent his frustrations upon the hated Imperial foe.

# AMIDST THE SMOKE AND SHADOWS

**The invasion of the Rock by the *Orac Unleashed* Balefleet was a battle unlike any other. Its theatres ranged from airless and desolate swathes of plains, crags and bastions beneath the wheeling fury of a void war, to the close and brutal confines of corridor by corridor fighting in the battle station's depths.**

Though it involved sufficient martial might on both sides to raise star systems, the war for the Rock was concentrated into the confines of a single, void-going fortress monastery and the battleships that clashed around it. This made for an especially ferocious and unforgiving conflict. The invaders had all the zealotry and ferocity of the Word Bearers, the time-honed and merciless veteran skill of the Black Legion, the embittered tenacity of the Iron Warriors, and all the malevolence and madness of the daemon legions of the soul forges to call upon. Yet the Dark Angels had the benefits of local knowledge, static fortifications – those not crippled by Vashtorr's machinations – and, of course, the indomitable determination of a Space Marine Chapter fighting with cold fury of those defending their home against rapacious invaders.

Every clash was vicious and without mercy. From the smallest skirmishes to the most sprawling battles, campaigns' worth of ordanance were expended in a matter of hours as both sides poured everything they had into their enemies. Battle reached to all but the innermost depths of the Rock, and as the savagery ebbed and flowed a thousand individual battlefields emerged throughout even the strangest and most claustrophobic environs.

Battling against the starry backdrop beyond a shimmering void field, Grand Master Azrael leads a blistering counter-attack to drive back the daemonic invaders of Embarkation Hangar Zarathas-Deus.

# BOARDING ACTION RULES



Over the following pages you will find bespoke rules for fielding each of the factions presented in this book. These rules are in addition to those found within *Arks of Omen: Abaddon* and work alongside the relevant Codexes. Within each you will find new, unique enhancements that can be taken by your **WARLORD**, additional Stratagems that can be used by your units in the dark and dangerous confines of boarding actions, and also any rules adjustments that need to be made to abilities and rules found within those Codexes. With these powerful new options at your disposal, your Boarding Patrols will be able to wage their close quarters warfare with a whole new level of savagery.

The factions found within this book are: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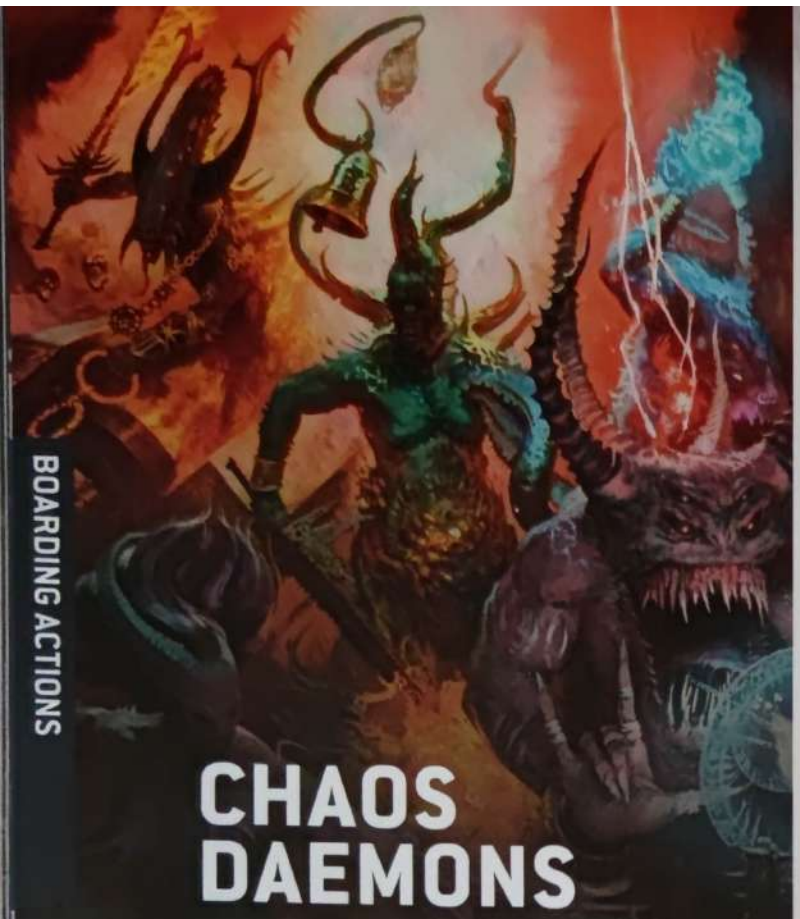


# CHAOS DAEMONS

*The daemons of Chaos burst from the pandemonium of warp space to despoil and corrupt all around. Unbound by even the most fundamental laws of realspace, these malevolent terrors unleash infernal powers upon their luckless victims.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **LEGIONES DAEMONICA**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- You can include one Fast Attack slot, but only if it is a **FLESH HOUNDS** unit.
- **FLAMER** units can be included in a Boarding Patrol Detachment even though they have the **FLY** keyword, but an **EXALTED FLAMER** model cannot have an Enhancement.
- When forming Boarding Squads, do not split **BLUE HORRORS** units into separate units.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **LEGIONES DAEMONICA**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Legiones Daemonica rules found in *Codex: Chaos Daemons*.

- All models lose the **FLY** keyword (if they have it) while they are on the battlefield.
- A **HORROR** model splitting can increase the size of that model's Boarding Squad above its starting size.
- Each time you use the Descending Shadow Warp Storm effect, subtract 1 from an attack's hit roll if the attacking model is more than 6" away, instead of 12".
- You cannot use the Malicious Misdirection Warp Storm effect.
- The Burning Terror Warp Storm effect costs 5 Warp Storm points.
- The Wave of Sickness Warp Storm effect costs 4 Warp Storm points.
- The *Bolt of Change* psychic power has a warp charge value of 9.
- The *Infernal Gateway* psychic power has a warp charge value of 10.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **LEGIONES DAEMONICA** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### UNHOLY FURY

*This entity is little more than a corporeal manifestation of anger, a gestalt personification of pure and unadulterated rage that hurls itself at its victims again and again.*

**KHORNE** model only. The bearer is eligible to declare a charge in a turn in which it Advanced or Fell Back.

### INCORPOREAL FORM

*This daemon's body flickers constantly in and out of reality, making it difficult for adversaries to land a telling blow against it.*

**TZEENTCH** model only. Each time an attack is made against the bearer, subtract 1 from that attack's wound roll.

### THE ENDLESS GIFT

*Only the most accomplished plague daemons are granted the Endless Gift. A disease of unutterable malignancy and repulsive beneficence, it changes form constantly from plague to infestation to malaise. The one constant is its ability to reknit its sufferer's corporeal form from even the most catastrophic of wounds.*

**NURGLE** model only. At the start of your Command phase, the bearer regains up to a number of lost wounds equal to the current battle round number.

### FATAL CARESS

*With a swift flick of a blade or razor-sharp claw, this daemon can inflict agonising pleasures that drive the victim instantly insane.*

**SLAANESH** model only. Each time the bearer makes a melee attack, on an unmodified successful wound roll of 5+, invulnerable saving throws cannot be made against that attack.

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **LEGIONES DEMONICA**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### FRENETIC BLOODLUST — 1CP/2CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*Ravening packs of Bloodletters spill down corridors and across chambers, seeking out the foe, eager to spill their blood.*

Use this Stratagem at the start of the Fight phase. Select one **BLOODLETTERS CORE** unit from your army. If that unit is not within Engagement Range of any enemy units, make a Normal Move of up to 6" with that unit. It must end this move closer to the closest visible enemy unit (if there is one). If that **BLOODLETTERS CORE** unit is within Engagement Range of any enemy units, make a pile-in move with that unit. If that unit makes a Normal Move, this Stratagem costs 2CP; otherwise, it costs 1CP.

### WAVE OF UNNATURAL FLAMES — 1CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*When Horrors of Tzeentch uneleash waves of overlapping flames, few are the foes who can escape them.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when a **HORRORS** unit from your army is selected to shoot. Until the end of the phase, each time a ranged attack is made by a model in that unit (excluding Brimstone Horror models), an unmodified successful hit roll of 5+ scores one additional hit.

### REVOLTING CONSTITUTION — 1CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*The supernatural corruption of Plaguebearers' physical forms is such that even the most grievous wounds do not trouble them.*

Use this Stratagem when a **PLAGUEBEARERS CORE** unit from your army is selected as the target of an attack. Until the end of the phase, each time an attack is made against that unit, an unmodified wound roll of 1-3 for that attack fails, irrespective of any abilities that the weapon or the model making the attack may have.

### MUTABLE FORM — 1CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Many daemons can shift their forms at will, drawing on the powers of the warp to manifest new weapons, powers and otherworldly abilities in the blink of an eye.*

Use this Stratagem in your Command phase. Select one **LEGIONES DAEMONICA** model from your army that has any Enhancements. You can replace one of that model's Enhancements with another. Select an Enhancement as normal and replace one of this model's existing Enhancements with it. If that new Enhancement has an effect which takes place at a specific point in the battle which has already passed, that Enhancement has no effect.

### DARK ALLURE — 1CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Daemons of Slaanesh possess a sickening yet mesmerising beauty that renders their enemies glassy-eyed with entrancement.*

Use this Stratagem at the end of your Movement phase. Select one enemy unit within 9" of and visible to one or more **SLAANESH** units from your army. Roll 2D6, if that **SLAANESH** unit has the **CHARACTER** keyword, you can re-roll this result: if the result is greater than or equal to that enemy unit's Leadership characteristic, then until the start of your next Movement phase:

- That unit cannot perform actions other than the Operate Hatchway action (if it is currently performing an action, it immediately fails), cannot fire Overwatch and is no longer Set to Defend.
- Subtract 2" from the Move charactistic of models in that enemy unit and halve Advance and charge rolls made for it.

### INSUBSTANTIAL ENTITIES — 2CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Daemons are not mortal creatures, their forms shifting between the warp and realspace, passing through solid barriers with ease.*

Use this Stratagem in your Movement phase, when a **LEGIONES DAEMONICA** unit from your army is selected to make a Normal Move. When making that move, models in that unit can move within Engagement Range of enemy models, and can move through models, walls and closed Hatchways, but cannot move more than 6" and cannot end their move within any of these, nor within Engagement Range of any enemy models. You can only use this Stratagem once.

### BEINGS OF THE EMPYREAN — 2CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Born of the warp, daemons are highly attuned to its power and tides, able to draw upon it and weave it at will.*

Use this Stratagem in your Psychic phase. Select one **LEGIONES DAEMONICA PSYKER** unit from your army. Until the end of the phase, that unit can attempt to manifest one additional psychic power.

### ICON OF CORRUPTION — 2CP

***Legiones Daemonica – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*The unearthly icons that are raised above the daemonic hosts take many grotesque forms, but all are loci for their powers.*

Use this Stratagem at the end of the Charge phase. Select one enemy unit that is within Engagement Range of a **LEGIONES DAEMONICA ICON** unit from your army and roll one D6 for each model in that enemy unit. For each result of 5+, that enemy unit suffers 1 mortal wound.

# NECRONS

*The ancient android race known as the Necrons once ruled the galaxy before being forced into a millions of years-long hibernation. Now they are rising again, determined to rebuild their long-lost empire.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **NECRONS**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- All **<DYNASTY>** units in your Boarding Patrol must be from the same dynasty.
- You can include up to 2 HQ slots, and you can include up to 2 **CHARACTER** models, but only if one of them is a **CRYPTEK** model (excluding named characters).
- You can add **CRYPTEK** units even if they have the **FLY** keyword.
- You can include one Fast Attack slot, but only if it is a **CANOPTEK SCARAB SWARMS** unit (even though it has the **FLY** keyword) or an **OPHYDIAN DESTROYERS** unit.
- You can only add one **CRYPTOTHRALLS** unit if your Boarding Patrol Detachment includes at least one **CRYPTEK** unit.
- You can only add one **CANOPTEK PLASMACYTE** unit, and only if your Boarding Patrol Detachment includes at least one **DESTROYER CULT** unit.
- Models in your Boarding Patrol cannot be given the Atavindicator, Metalodermal Tesla Weave or Quantum Orb Cryptek Arkana.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **NECRONS**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Necrons rules found in *Codex: Necrons*.

- All models lose the **FLY** keyword (if they have it) while they are on the battlefield.
- When a model translocates using the Translocation Beams dynastic code, it can move across models as if they were not there but it cannot move across terrain, such as Walls and closed Hatchways.
- If any units from your army have the Aggresively Territorial dynastic code or the Eternal Conquerers dynastic tradition,instead of all of those units gaining the Objective Secured ability, each **INFANTRY** model in such a unit counts as one additional model when determining control of an objective marker.
- If any units from your army have the Relentlessly Expansionist circumstance of awakening, rather than all units with it making a Normal Move at the start of the battle, you select one of those units that is within one of your Entry Zones at the start of the battle to make a Normal Move of up to 6" instead.
- When you deploy a **DESTROYER CULT** unit (excluding **SKORPEKH LORD** units) in an Entry Zone, you can deploy a friendly **CANOPTEK PLASMACYTE** unit in that Entry Zone as well.
- If a **SKORPEKH LORD** model is your **WARLORD**, each time you set up another unit from your army on the battlefield, you cannot set your **WARLORD** up sharing its Entry Zone alongside that unit.
- **FLAYED ONES** gain the following ability:

  **Lurking Horrors:** Each time an attack is made against this unit, subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **NECRONS** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### NANOWEAVE PHASE SHIFTER

*This phase shifter renders the bearer incorporeal when activated.*

Once per battle, when the bearer is selected to make a Normal Move, it can use this Enhancement. If it does so, until that move is finished, it can move within Engagement Range of enemy models and it can move though models, Walls and closed Hatchways, but it cannot end its move within any of these, nor within Engagement Range of any enemy models.

### ENDURING WILL

*No mortal weaponry will break this warlord's iron resolve.*

Each time an attack is allocated to the bearer, subtract 1 from the Damage characteristic of that attack (to a minimum of 1).

### MINDMESH COMMAND NODE

*This device ensures the wearer is in full control over their legions.*

**NOBLE** model only. While the bearer is on the battlefield, all friendly **NECRONS** units on the battlefield benefit from the selected directive of your army's active command protocol.

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **NECRONS**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### RAPID REANIMATION — 1CP/2CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*Utilising ancient energy prioritisation technologies, Necron reanimation protocols are overcharged and rank upon rank of sundered Necron soldiery return to their feet.*

Use this Stratagem when a unit from your army has its reanimation protocols enacted. Until the end of the phase, add 1 to all reanimation protocols rolls made for that unit. If you have a **CRYPTEK** model or a **CHARACTER** model equipped with a Resurrection Orb on the battlefield, this Stratagem costs 1CP; otherwise, it costs 2CP.

### SHIELD-PIERCER PROJECTORS — 1CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*The Necrons have access to dark and terrible technologies that they can fold into their warriors' weapons with horrifying ease, enabling them to overcome the most sophisticated enemy defences.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when a **NECRONS** model from your army shoots with a ranged weapon. Until the end of the phase, each time that model makes an attack with that weapon, invulnerable saving throws cannot be taken against that attack.

### RESURRECTION PROTOCOLS — 2CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*Necron rulers possess sophisticated self-repair systems that can reknit their corporeal forms after even the most grievous wounds.*

Use this Stratagem in any phase, when a **NECRONS CHARACTER** model from your army is destroyed. You can choose to roll one D6 at the end of the phase instead of using any rules that are triggered when that model is destroyed (e.g. the Surrogate Hosts ability). If you do so, then on a 4+, set that model back up on the battlefield as close as possible to where they were destroyed and more than 1" away from any enemy models, with D3 wounds remaining. This Stratagem cannot be used to set the same model back up more than once per battle.

### NANOSCARAB VIRUS — 2CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*The Necrons possess swarms of minute nanoscarabs that feed off code and electrical power and rapidly reproducing.*

Use this Stratagem in your Command phase. Select one **NECRONS CHARACTER** unit from your army (excluding **DESTROYER CULT** units). Close every open Hatchway that is within 3" of that unit. You can only use this Stratagem once.

### MINDSHACKLE SCARABS — 1CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Mindshackle scarabs are one of the Necrons' chief methods of controlling alien races.*

Use this Stratagem at the end of your Movement phase. Select one enemy unit within 12" of a **NECRONS CHARACTER** model from your army. Roll 3D6: if the result is greater than that unit's Leadership characteristic, then until the start of your next Movement phase, that unit is mindshackled. While a unit is mindshackled:

- Halve the Move characteristic of models in that unit.
- That unit cannot perform actions other than the Operate Hatchway action (if it is currently performing an action, it immediately fails), cannot fire Overwatch and is no longer Set to Defend.

### DISRUPTION FIELDS — 1CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*The thrumming aura of negative energy known as a disruption field warps and dissolves both armour and flesh.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when a **NECRONS** unit from your army is selected to fight. Until the end of the phase, add 1 to the Strength characteristic of models in that unit.

### FLENSING CAPACITORS — 1CP

***Necrons – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*Molecular disintegration emitters activate within these Necrons' weapons, flaying away additional layers of enemy armour.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when a **NECRONS** unit from your army is selected to shoot. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit makes an attack with a gauss weapon (see *Codex: Necrons*), an unmodified successful hit roll of 5+ automatically wounds the target.

# TYRANIDS

*The Tyranids are a seemingly infinite race of extragalactic life forms that exist to hunt, kill and devour all organic life. Be it the warriors of enemy armies or the biospheres of verdant worlds, all are simply biomass to be consumed by the swarm.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **HIVE TENDRIL**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- All **<HIVE FLEET>** units in your Boarding Patrol must be from the same hive fleet.
- **NEUROTHROPE**, **ZOANTHROPES** and **VENOMTHROPES** units can be included in a Boarding Patrol Detachment even though they have the **FLY** keyword.
- You cannot include both a **ZOANTHROPES** and a **VENOMTHROPES** unit.
- You can only include one **LICTOR** unit.
- You can include one Fast Attack slot, but only if it is a **RIPPER SWARMS** unit.
- When forming Boarding Squads, do not split **TERMAGANTS** or **HORMAGAUNTS** units into separate units.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **HIVE TENDRIL**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Tyranids rules found in *Codex: Tyranids*.

- All models lose the **FLY** keyword (if they have it) while they are on the battlefield.
- You can measure through Walls and closed Hatchways when determining if:
  - A unit is within 6" of another friendly model for the purposes of the Synapse rule or any Synaptic Imperative abilities.
  - A unit is within Synaptic Link range of another friendly model (excluding when manifesting psychic powers).
- If any units from your army have the Synaptic Goading biomorphology, rather than all **ENDLESS MULTITUDE** units with that biomorphology making a Normal Move at the start of the battle, you select one of them that is within one of your Entry Zones at the start of the battle to make a Normal Move of up to 6" instead.
- When manifesting the *Paroxysm* psychic power, in addition to the selected unit not being able to perform the Set Overwatch or Set to Defend actions until the start of your next Psychic phase, if that unit has already performed those actions, it is no longer considered to have Set Overwatch or Set to Defend.
- When an enemy model makes a ranged attack at a unit with the Tunnel Networks adaptation or Naturalised Camouflage biomorphology, that unit is treated as having the benefits of cover against that attack if the attacking model is more than 6" away from its target.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **HIVE TENDRIL** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### HUNTER'S INSTINCTS

*The Tyranid's senses are primed for hunting, capable of detecting even the best hidden or disguised prey.*

Each time the bearer declares a charge, it can select units that are not visible to it as targets of that charge.

### SHADOW CONNECTION

*Deeply psychically connected to the broods of Tyranids it leads, this creature can support them even if the thick walls of ships are between it and its charges.*

**PSYKER** model only. Each time the bearer manifests a Blessing psychic power, you can measure through Walls and closed Hatchways when determining if a unit is within range of that psychic power.

### WALL-CLIMBER

*This Tyranid can bound along the length of walls and even cling to the ceiling as it dashes towards its enemy, moving between them so swiftly few foes can target it accurately.*

Each time an attack is made against the bearer, subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll.

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **HIVE TENDRIL**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### ADRENAL SURGE 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*These warrior organisms destroy all as their adrenaline surges.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when an **ADRENAL GLANDS** unit from your army is selected to fight. Until the end of the phase, add 1 to the Attacks characteristic of models in that unit.

### ACID BLOOD 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*Caustic fluids flow through the blood vessels of some Tyranids, spraying over any enemy that wounds them.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when an enemy unit is selected to fight. Select one **HIVE TENDRIL** unit from your army within Engagement Range of that enemy unit. Until that enemy unit finishes making its attacks, each time a model in that **HIVE TENDRIL** unit loses a wound, roll one D6: on a 5+, after that enemy unit has finished making its attacks, it suffers 1 mortal wound (to a maximum of 3 mortal wounds).

### LAYERED CHITIN 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*When armoured with multiple layers of thick chitin, Tyranids can shrug off direct hits.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when a **HIVE TENDRIL** unit from your army containing models with a Wounds characteristic of more than 1 is selected as the target of an attack. Until the end of the phase, each time an attack is made against that unit, subtract 1 from the Strength characteristic of that attack.

### SUDDEN POUNCE 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Unwary foes cannot spot the silent and still Tyranids hiding amongst the vents, which strike with preternatural speed.*

Use this Stratagem in your opponent's Charge phase. Select one **HIVE TENDRIL** unit from your army. Until the end of the phase, that unit is eligible to perform Heroic Interventions as if it were a **CHARACTER**.

### LIVING RAMS 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Such is the Tyranids' numbers and hunger, they can force open bulkheads with sheer mass and momentum.*

Use this Stratagem in your Movement phase, when an **ENDLESS MULTITUDE** unit from your army is selected to make a Normal Move or Advance. Until the end of the phase, once while moving a model in that unit, you can open one Hatchway that is within 1" of that model. This does not end that model's movement, it can continue to move up to its full movement distance after the Hatchway is opened.

### RAVENOUS TIDE 1CP

***Tyranids - Boarding Actions - Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*The Hive Mind pushes forward in a living tide of ravenous maws.*

Use this Stratagem in your Movement phase, when a **HIVE TENDRIL** unit from your army is selected to Fall Back. Until the end of the turn:

- That unit is still eligible to declare a charge this turn even though it Fell Back.
- If that unit has the **ENDLESS MULTITUDE** or **RIPPER SWARMS** keywords, then when Falling Back, models in that unit can move across other models as if they were not there (they cannot finish a move on top of another model or its base).

*'They came right over the hull, spilled out of that huge shard of bone and flesh that had speared our stark'd flank. Hard vacuum didn't touch them at all. Servitor guns didn't do much more. They tore their way in through the third-level aft batteries easy as you or I would rip up parchment. Then it was all alarm hymnals, and screaming, and gunfire, and so much Emperor'damned bleed.'*

- Petty Officer Second-class Ravencha Pelligaris, survivor of the battle of Dachermann's Strait

# GENESTEALER CULTS

*Adoring worshippers of the Star Gods, these xenobred fanatics look forward to the day when their deities will liberate them from Imperial oppression. In the meantime, they wage guerrilla wars and prepare a great uprising.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **GENESTEALER CULTS**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- All **<CULT>** units in your Boarding Patrol must be from the same Cult.
- You can include up to 3 **CHARACTER** models, but only one of these can have a Wounds characteristic of 5 or more.
- Units in your Boarding Patrol cannot be given Proficient Planning upgrades.
- You cannot include **BROOD BROTHERS** units in your Boarding Patrol.
- When forming Boarding Squads, do not split **NEOPHYTE HYBRIDS** units into separate units.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **GENESTEALER CULTS**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Genestealer Cults rules found in *Codex: Genestealer Cults*.

- Each time a unit from your army summons the cult, halve the number of models added back to that unit, rounding up. In addition, each unit from your army cannot summon the cult more than once.
- Units lose the Conceal rule and your Boarding Patrol gains the following rule:

  **Concealed Ambush:** Before the battle, in the Deploy Armies step, your opponent must set up their entire Boarding Patrol before you set up yours. If both players Boarding Patrols have this rule, each player sets up their units as normal.

- Walls are considered to have the Obscuring terrain trait for the purpose of determining if a target is Exposed.
- When an enemy model makes a ranged attack against a unit with the Subterranean Ambushers Cult Creed or Naturalised Camouflage biomorphology, that unit is treated as having the benefits of cover against that attack if the attacking model is more than 6" away from its target.
- The *Mental Onslaught* psychic power has a warp charge value of 7.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **GENESTEALER CULTS** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### SHADOW STALKER

*The gloom seems to cling to this cultist like a shroud as they emerge grinning from the darkness, claws flexing in anticipation of the kill.*

Each time an attack is made against the bearer, subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll.

### ALIEN REGALITY

*An aura of palpable grandeur surrounds this cultist, making their mere presence a powerful stimulant to their followers.*

- Add 3" to the range of the bearer's aura abilities (to a maximum of 9").
- Add 3" to the range of the bearer's Meticulous Planner ability, if it has it.

### INSTINCTIVE COUNTERSTRIKE

*Drawing upon the fullness of its alien instincts, the cultist psychically pushes its followers into a savage counter-attack.*

In your opponent's Charge phase, select one friendly **GENESTEALER CULTS** unit within 9" of the bearer. Until the end of the phase, that unit is eligible to perform Heroic Interventions as if it were a **CHARACTER** unit and is eligible to perform a Heroic Intervention if it is within 6" horizontally of any enemy units. When doing so, you can move each model in that unit up to 6". All other rules for Heroic Interventions still apply.

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **GENESTEALER CULTS**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### SHADOW DWELLERS — 1CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*As enemy fire hammers their position, so the faithful melt into the shadows to avoid its fury.*

Use this Stratagem in your opponent's Shooting phase, when a **GENESTEALER CULTS INFANTRY** unit from your army is selected as the target of an attack. If any of the models in that unit would receive the benefits of cover against that attack, until the end of the phase, each time a ranged attack is allocated to a model in that unit, add an additional 1 to any armour saving throw made against that attack.

### MONSTROUS VIGOUR — 1CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*The Aberrants of the cult's dark underbelly are terrifying in their ability to shrug off horrific damage.*

Use this Stratagem in any phase, when an **ABERRANT** or **ABOMINANT** unit from your army is selected as the target of an attack. Until the end of the phase, each time an attack is made against that unit, an unmodified wound roll of 1-3 for that attack fails, irrespective of any abilities that the weapon or the model making the attack may have.

### OVERWHELMING FIRE — 1CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*A key tenet of guerrilla warfare is knowing how to concentrate the fire of even inferior weapons to inflict maximum harm.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when a **GENESTEALER CULTS CROSSFIRE** unit is selected to shoot. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit makes a ranged attack, if all the models in that unit target one enemy unit that has a crossfire marker (see *Codex: Genestealer Cults*), an unmodified successful hit roll of 5+ automatically wounds the target.

### THE CULT MIND — 1CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*Cult psykers are able to employ the minds of the faithful as willing conduits for their unnatural powers.*

Use this Stratagem in your Psychic phase, when a **GENESTEALER CULTS PSYKER** model from your army manifests a Blessing psychic power that instructs you to select a friendly unit. Until the end of the phase, each time you are instructed to select a friendly **GENESTEALER CULTS** unit when that model is manifesting a Blessing psychic power, you can select a friendly **GENESTEALER CULTS** unit anywhere on the battlefield (that unit does not have to be visible to or within any specified range of that **PSYKER** model).

### VICIOUS TO THE END — 1CP/2CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*Driven by primal instincts and fanatical hatred, Genestealer Cultists fight viciously when upon the brink of death.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when a **GENESTEALER CULTS** unit (excluding **HYBRID METAMORPHS** units) from your army that has not already been selected to fight this phase is selected as the target of an attack. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit is destroyed, do not remove it from play. The destroyed model can fight after the attacking model's unit has finished making attacks, and is then removed from play. If that unit has the **CHARACTER** keyword, this Stratagem costs 2CP; otherwise, it costs 1CP.

### INSIDIOUS INFILTRATORS — 1CP

***Genestealer Cults – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Genestealer Cultists are preternaturally skilled and determined infiltrators, navigating seemingly impassable vents and tunnels to sneak up on the foe.*

Use this Stratagem during deployment. Select one **GENESTEALER CULTS** unit from your army. You can set up that unit in the vents instead of setting it up on the battlefield. If you do so, then in the Reinforcements step of one of your Movement phases, you can set up that unit anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 9" away from any enemy models. You can only use this Stratagem once.

*'We are those you do not see, the lurkers in the shadows, the worms a-writhe behind bulkhead and deck. You think yourselves safe aboard your mighty ships, cosseted in the icy grip of the void. You will learn too late that these are not sanctuaries, but traps, for we are in here with you.'*

– Primus Hresh Kasvor of the Void Wyrm Sect

# DEATH GUARD

*The scions of Mortarion are the chosen warriors of Nurgle, the Plague God. A Heretic Astartes Traitor Legion, they have fought to topple the Imperium and spread the bounties of their diseased patron deity for ten thousand years.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **DEATH GUARD**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- All **<PLAGUE COMPANY>** units in your Boarding Patrol must be from the same Plague Company.
- You can include up to 2 **CHARACTER** models, but only if at least one of them is a **FOETID VIRION** unit.
- You can include one Fast Attack slot, but only if it is a **CHAOS SPAWN** unit.
- You cannot include more than one unit of **CULTISTS** and the combined total number of **CULTISTS** and **POXWALKERS** units cannot exceed the number of **PLAGUE MARINES** units.
- Models in your Boarding Patrol cannot be given the Unstable Sickness or Viscous Death Deadly Pathogens.
- When forming Boarding Squads, do not split **CULTISTS** or **POXWALKERS** units into separate units.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **DEATH GUARD**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Death Guard rules found in *Codex: Death Guard*.

- A **DEATH GUARD CHAOS SPAWN** model has a Toughness characteristic of 6 and the Disgustingly Resilient ability.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **DEATH GUARD** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### PLAGUE VECTOR

*Blessed by generous Nurgle, this warrior is contagion personified, a walking source of the foulest and most virulent plagues.*

The bearer gains their Plague Company's Warlord Trait. If the bearer gains the Shamblerot Warlord Trait, when rolling to see if an enemy unit suffers mortal wounds as a result of Shamblerot, that unit only suffers 1 mortal wound on a roll of 6, instead of D3 mortal wounds.

### PLENTIFUL PUSTULANCE

*So vast and bloated has this warlord become that he is all but immune to the pain of injury.*

Each time the bearer would lose a wound, roll one D6: on a 5+, that wound is not lost.

### PLAGUE SKULL OF GLOTHILA

*This oversized death's head was once the skull of the Chaos Lord Glothila, whose dying wish was to become a weapon of purest evil.*

Once per battle, at the end of your Movement phase, the bearer can use this Enhancement. If it does so, select one enemy unit within 6" of the bearer and roll seven D6s: for each 4+, that unit suffers 1 mortal wound (to a maximum of 3 mortal wounds if that enemy unit has the **CHARACTER** keyword).

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **DEATH GUARD**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### BLADE-BORNE INFECTORS 1CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*Many Death Guard take a sick pleasure in the wielding of plague weapons, delighting in every malady and infection the barest scratch of their weapons inflict.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when a **DEATH GUARD** unit from your army is selected to fight. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit makes an attack with a plague weapon (see *Codex: Death Guard*), an unmodified hit roll of 6 scores 1 additional hit.

### EXPLOSION OF PUTRIDITY 1CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*The slain warrior bursts like a fat, pox-laden buboe.*

Use this Stratagem in any phase, when a **DEATH GUARD CHARACTER** model from your army is destroyed instead of using any other rules that are triggered when a model is destroyed (e.g. the Putrid Explosion ability, see *Codex: Death Guard*). Before removing that model from play, roll one D6 for each other unit within 3" (excluding **NURGLE** units): on a 2-5, that unit suffers 1 mortal wound; on a 5+, that unit suffers 2 mortal wounds.

### HERALDS OF DESPAIR 1CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Terminators are terrifying foes to face. When Death Guard Terminators slice opponents in half or unleash plague weapons that turn living beings to pools of foetid slush, they shatter the spirits of those who still live and stand against them.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when a **DEATH GUARD TERMINATOR** model from your army destroys a model in an enemy unit. Until the end of the turn, subtract 3 from the Leadership characteristic of models in that unit.

### CLOUD OF FLIES 1CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*With a thrumming roar, a thick cloud of daemon flies whirls around the Death Guard and obscures them from the enemy's sight.*

Use this Stratagem at the start of your opponent's Shooting phase. Select one **BUBONIC ASTARTES** unit from your army. Until the end of the phase, each time an enemy model makes a ranged attack at that unit, that unit receives the benefits of cover against that attack even if it is fully visible.

### RAIN OF BLIGHT 1CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*The effects of blight grenades – so horrendous to their victims – have no impact on the Death Guard, who gladly use the devices in extreme close quarters with the enemy.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase. Select one **DEATH GUARD** model from your army. Until the end of the phase, plague weapons with the Grenade type which that model is equipped with lose the Blast ability, have a Type characteristic of Pistol 6, and each time that model makes an attack with one of those weapons against an enemy unit within Engagement Range, that attack automatically hits the target.

### CONTAMINATED ROUNDS 1CP/2CP

***Death Guard – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*The Death Guard know countless revolting ways to render their bolt rounds horrifically virulent.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when a **DEATH GUARD** unit from your army is selected to shoot. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit makes an attack with a bolt weapon (see *Codex: Death Guard*), you can re-roll the wound roll. If that unit has the **TERMINATOR** keyword, this Stratagem costs 2CP; otherwise, it costs 1CP.

*'Shipboard warfare is a blessing from Grandsire Nurgle himself, for we ferrymen excel in its every aspect. What foe can bring enough guns to bear to even slow our relentless advance amidst such tight confines and limited sightlines? What despairing foul can escape the gifts of contagion we bring, trapped as they are within the confines of a single ship, breathing the same recycled air? The moment such a battle begins, we are already victorious and our foes already slain. They simply need time to realise it.'*

– Gurrlosh Throx, 6th Plague Company

# ADEPTUS MECHANICUS

*The techno-religious cult of the Adeptus Mechanicus is amongst the most vital and powerful institutions within the Imperium, controlling the creation and use of Mankind's technologies.*

## MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

When mustering a Boarding Patrol, if your Faction is **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS**, then the following rules apply when adding units to your Boarding Patrol Detachment, and they take priority over the normal rules for mustering a Boarding Patrol.

- All **<FORGE WORLD>** units in your Boarding Patrol must be from the same forge world.
- You can include one and no more than one unit of **KATAPHRON BREACHERS**.
- You can include one and no more than one unit of **KATAPHRON DESTROYERS**.
- You can only add one **SERVITORS** unit if your Boarding Patrol Detachment includes at least one **TECH PRIEST**.
- You cannot include a **CYBERNETICA DATASMITH**.

## RULES ADAPTATIONS

If your Faction is **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS**, then the following rules adaptations apply to Adeptus Mechanicus rules found in *Codex: Adeptus Mechanicus*.

- The Doctrina Imperatives ability (see *Codex: Adeptus Mechanicus*) only applies if your **WARLORD** is a **SKITARII MARSHAL** model.
- The Canticles of the Omnissiah ability (see *Codex: Adeptus Mechanicus*) only applies if your **WARLORD** is a **TECH PRIEST** model or has the Masters of the Forge dogma.
- When an enemy model makes a ranged attack at a unit with the Shroud Protocols dogma, that unit is treated as having the benefits of cover against that attack if the attacking model is more than 6" away from its target.

## ENHANCEMENTS

If your **WARLORD** has the **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS** keyword, then when mustering your Boarding Patrol, they can be given one of the following Enhancements instead of one from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*.

### COGITATOR OVERRIDE NODE

*This device contains a cogitator that rapidly cycles through security coding sequences to infiltrate bulkhead lock systems.*

**TECH PRIEST** model only. The bearer can perform the Operate Hatchway action while it is within 9" of a Hatchway. If your opponent attempts to prevent that action from being completed, you can use the bearer's Strength characteristic as if it was within 1" of that Hatchway.

### MASTERWORK BIONICS

*Human flesh is an anachronism, a sad legacy of a civilisation whose time has come and gone. Perfection is in crafting.*

Add 1 to armour saving throws made for the bearer and the bearer has a 4+ invulnerable save.

### THE SKULL OF KOMODUS

*The Skitarii Marshal Komodus 8-9-α was noted for his marksmanship capabilities by his Tech-Magi commanders during his life, and blessed him with all manner of augmetics to further improve his vision, range-finding abilities and target-acquiring skills. When he was finally slain, his skull was kept, for though the living being was dead, his bionic head lost none of its potence.*

**SKITARII MARSHAL** model only. In your Command phase, select one friendly **SKITARII CORE** unit within 6" of the bearer. Until the start of your next Command phase, each time a model in that unit makes an attack, you can re-roll the hit roll.

## BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

If your Faction is **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS**, then when playing a Boarding Action game you will have access to the following Stratagems, and can spend CP to use them.

### ELIMINATION DIRECTIVE 1CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Battle Tactic Stratagem***

*It is possible to overcharge the augur spirits of battle servitors, homing their detection nodes in on vulnerable systems.*

Use this Stratagem in your Shooting phase, when an **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS** unit from your army is selected to shoot. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that unit makes an attack that targets a unit within half range, improve the Armour Penetration characteristic of that attack by 1.

### OMNISSIAH'S SHIELD 2CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Epic Deed Stratagem***

*This protective blessing moves the Omnissiah's flock to defy enemy attack.*

Use this Stratagem in any phase, when an **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS** unit from your army is selected as the target of an attack. Until the end of the phase, models in that unit have a 4+ invulnerable save.

### ROBOTIC PROTOCOLS 1CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Many Tech-Magi program their battle-units with default self-defence protocols to ensure that should they withdraw from close-quarters combat they unleash steady volleys of fire to keep the enemy's heads down and buy them time. Though this fire is invariably less accurate, it is adequate enough to prevent needless waste of fighting-capable units.*

Use this Stratagem in your Movement phase, when a **SKITARII** or **KATAPHRON SERVITORS** unit from your army is selected to Fall Back. Until the end of the turn, that unit is eligible to shoot in a turn in which it Fell Back; if it does so, each time a model in it makes a ranged attack as a result of this Stratagem, subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll.

### COVENANT OF THE HUNT 1CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*Runestalker hunting imperatives see Sicarians swiftly and silently encircle the foe, the hum of their blades stilled.*

Use this Stratagem in your Movement phase, when a **SICARIAN** unit from your army is selected to Advance. Until the end of the turn:

- The Type characteristic of Pistol weapons models in that unit are equipped with is changed to Assault.
- That unit is eligible to declare a charge in a turn in which it Advanced.

### POWER OF THE MOTIVE FORCE 1CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Strategic Ploy Stratagem***

*The truly devout can send a sudden charge of the Motive Force pulsing through their numerous augmentations, stunning nearby foes.*

Use this Stratagem in the Fight phase, when an enemy unit within Engagement Range of an **ELECTRO-PRIESTS** or **TECH PRIEST** unit from your army is selected to fight. Until the end of the phase, each time a model in that enemy unit makes an attack, subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll and it cannot be re-rolled.

### INFOSLAVE SKULL 1CP

***Adeptus Mechanicus – Boarding Actions – Wargear Stratagem***

*Mono-task infoslave skulls make ideal lookouts to watch against the sudden deployment of enemy troops.*

Use this Stratagem when an **ADEPTUS MECHANICUS** unit from your army successfully completes the Set Overwatch action. While that unit is Set Overwatch it also Holds Steady.

*'To fight within the corridors of a divine warship of the Omnissiah's crafting, that is a blessing beyond compare. Each warrior who fights in defence of the navis macrocorpus becomes another cog in the machine itself, each contributing to its sanctity, each driving back the unclean. Yet to carry the fight into the perverse innards of a vessel corrupted by heresy or, worse, fashioned by the unholy arts of xenos manufacture – that is a still greater charge, for then we must become fire, there to cleanse corruption from the inside out.'*

- Skitarii Marshal Gau-Theta-5-Rho

# THE ROCK BESIEGED CAMPAIGN MISSIONS

Over the following pages you will find eight inter-linked missions that allow you to play through the Rock Besieged campaign in your Boarding Action games. If you have the Boarding Action rules from *Arks of Omen: Abaddon* and the Warhammer 40,000 Boarding Actions Terrain Set, then you can play any of the missions presented here. These battles have been designed to work best when played in sequence as part of an ongoing narrative for two players, but have also been balanced to be playable as standalone missions, if you so choose.

They have been broken down into four chapters, each representing a crucial series of events from the storyline presented earlier in this book. Each mission will have a rule called Campaign Outcome, which will describe the battle's effects on a later battle. When playing these missions as part of a campaign, these sections will explain what details you need to make a note of and give you some hints as to how your future fortunes will be affected by the day's results.

The chapters and their associated missions are as follows:

### SCOUR THE DARKNESS

*The forces of Vashtorr assault an Inquisition outpost in their hunt for the location of the Rock.*

- Find the Signal Data

### WAR IN THE WARP

*The loyalist armada defending the Rock comes under attack. Facing overwhelming odds, can they survive to fight another day?*

- Take the Teleportarium
- Geller Field Collapse

### FALL OF THE ROCK

*As Vashtorr's daemonic legions launch their assault against the fortress monastery, its desperate defenders mount a hasty defence.*

- Drastic Defence
- Rapid Withdrawal
- Desperate Holdout

### RECLAMATION

*With the loyalist fleet returning, the Rock's defenders are able to take back the initiative and launch a counter-offensive. Will they be able to exorcise the taint of Chaos from their fortress monastery?*

- Retake the Elevator
- Hunt the Damned

## CHAOS VS IMPERIUM

This storyline presented in this campaign revolves around the Chaos forces' attack on the Rock and several other Imperium installations. As such (and because the role of Attacker and Defender changes between these two factions depending on the mission involved) each player in a mission is labelled as either the Chaos player or the Imperium player. However, when playing these missions, there is no requirement for either player to have one of these armies, and we encourage you to repurpose these missions for whichever factions you and your opponent have to hand, with the battles on offer easily representing any number of other similar orbital attacks on planetary-based incumbents.

If you are playing these missions as part of an ongoing campaign, then before the first battle, you and your opponent should each pick which role you want to take on and then continue to play as that role throughout all of the games to come.

## KILLZONE UPGRADE: SHADOWVAULTS

Some of these missions can also be augmented with the Killzone Upgrade: Shadowvaults set. This set provides several new elements, including a scenery piece that can be incorporated into the game board and new models that can become a part of a player's army. These are broken into two categories - Attacker's Upgrades and Defender's Upgrades.

If the mission you are playing uses this set, then it will state so and also specify which upgrades each player has access to. Each of these upgrades costs a number of points that must be paid when mustering your army. Any upgrades a player takes must be included on their army roster.

# BOARDING ACTION GAMES

**A Boarding Action game is waged by following the sequence below.**

## 1. DETERMINE MISSION

Players determine which mission to play from the Boarding Action missions presented in this book. This will determine the deployment map that players use, as well as the specific mission briefing. Players can either simply agree which they will use with their opponent, or, if playing these missions as part of an ongoing campaign, play them in the order below.

**ROCK BESIEGED CAMPAIGN MISSIONS**

| ORDER | MISSION |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Find the Signal Data** (pg 76) |
| 2 | **Take the Teleportarium** (pg 78) |
| 3 | **Geller Field Collapse** (pg 80) |
| 4 | **Drastic Defence** (pg 82) |
| 5 | **Rapid Withdrawal** (pg 84) |
| 6 | **Desperate Holdout** (pg 86) |
| 7 | **Retake the Elevator** (pg 88) |
| 8 | **Hunt the Damned** (pg 90) |

## 2. READ MISSION BRIEFING

Each mission has a mission briefing that will detail the aims of the battle. Each mission will also list one or more additional mission rules that will apply for the duration of the battle, and a series of objectives that award victory points. Players should read and familiarise themselves with these before proceeding.

## 3. MUSTER BOARDING PATROL

Players must first muster their Boarding Patrol, as described in *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*. If the Mission Briefing allows either player to take any Killzone Upgrade: Shadowvaults upgrades, they may do so and add these to their army roster. Each player must then provide a copy of their army roster for their opponent to read through. If, when players compare their points total, one player's is at least 30 points less than their opponent's, then the player with the smaller points total is the Underdog, and they may receive an Underdog Bonus as detailed in the mission they are playing.

## 4. CREATE THE BATTLEFIELD AND PLACE OBJECTIVE MARKERS

Players now create the battlefield and set up terrain features. Missions are played on Boarding Action battlefields and the position of all terrain features – Walls and Hatchways – and objective markers that must be placed on the battlefield will be shown on the deployment map of the mission players are playing. Each mission will also specify which Hatchways start the mission open and which start the mission closed. If either player has any of the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74) in their army, these will be set up on the battlefield in this step.

## 5. FORM BOARDING SQUADS

Each unit in a player's Boarding Patrol that has a Unit Strength of 10 must now be split into two units, each containing 5 models. When splitting a unit, make a note of which models form each of the two new units. From this point onwards, these split units count as independent units for all rules purposes.

## 6. GENERATE STARTING COMMAND POINTS

Each player starts with 1 Command point.

## 7. DEPLOY ARMIES

Players alternate setting up their units one at a time, starting with the Defender. For each of a player's Entry Zones (as shown in the mission map), that player sets up one unit within that Entry Zone.

If a unit has a pre-battle rule that allows it to be set up anywhere on the battlefield, that unit is instead set up wholly within 6" of its Entry Zone. That Entry Zone is then considered to have had a unit set up within it, and cannot have another unit set up within it before the start of the battle. If one player finishes deploying all their units, their opponent then deploys the remainder of their units, until either both players have set up one unit per Entry Zone, or all units have been deployed.

If both players have units with abilities that allow them to be set up after both armies have deployed, players must roll off after all other units have been set up and alternate setting up these units, starting with the winner.

## 8. DETERMINE RESERVES

Any units in a player's army that do not start the battle on the battlefield, will start the battle in Strategic Reserves. This does not cost any Command points to do so.

In the Reinforcements step of a player's Movement phase (starting from the first battle round onwards), that player can select one of their Strategic Reserves units for each of their Entry Zones that has no models within it and set those units up within those Entry Zones.

If one or more of a player's Strategic Reserves units has a rule that would allow them to be set up in a location other than the battlefield (e.g. Teleport Strike) then in each of that player's turns (starting from the second battle round onwards), one of those units can be set up on the battlefield as described by their rule that turn, instead of being set up within an Entry Zone. Any Strategic Reserves units that have not arrived on the battlefield by the end of the fourth battle round count as having been destroyed (this does not apply to units that are placed into Strategic Reserves, after the first battle round has started).

### ENTRY ZONES

In Boarding Actions, each player will have one or more deployment zones called Entry Zones. Each time a unit from a player's Boarding Patrol is set up, it must be set up wholly within one of that player's Entry Zones. If a unit will not fit wholly within an Entry Zone, all of its models must be set up as close to the centre of that Entry Zone as possible.

Players cannot set up a unit within an Entry Zone if any other unit is in that Entry Zone. However, when setting up a unit at the start of the battle, players can set up their **WARLORD** alongside that unit as if it was a part of it, using the same Entry Zone. Rules that prevent a unit from being set up within a specific distance of another model or unit cannot prevent a unit from being set up within an Entry Zone.

## 9. DETERMINE FIRST TURN

Players roll off and the winner takes the first turn.

## 10. RESOLVE PRE-BATTLE ABILITIES

Each player can resolve a single pre-battle ability that units in their army may have, irrespective of how many units in their army may have them, starting with the player taking the first turn.

## 11. BEGIN THE BATTLE

The first battle round begins. Players continue to resolve battle rounds until the battle ends.

## 12. ENDING THE BATTLE

The battle ends after five battle rounds have been completed. If one player has no models remaining in their army at the start of their turn, the other player may continue to play out their turns until the battle ends.

## 13. DETERMINE VICTOR

At the end of the battle, the player with the most victory points is the winner. If players are tied, the battle is a draw.

Each player can score a maximum of 90 victory points from mission objectives (any excess victory points awarded are discounted). If every model in a player's army was painted to a Battle Ready standard, that player is awarded a bonus 10 victory points. This gives players a maximum total score out of 100 victory points.

## 14. CAMPAIGN OUTCOME

If playing this mission as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, players will need to make a note of certain aspects of the game's outcome, as described in the Mission Briefing. Each player should make a note of these now.

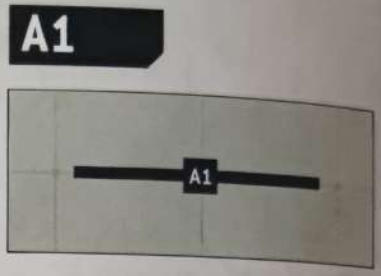
### MISSION OBJECTIVES

During the battle, players can earn victory points by achieving mission objectives. There are two types of mission objectives: Progressive and End Game. Progressive mission objectives are scored during the battle (exactly when is detailed on the objective itself), and can be achieved, and hence award victory points, several times. End Game mission objectives are scored at the end of the battle.

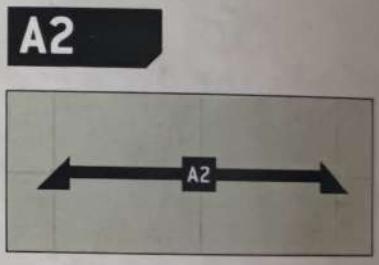
# COMPONENTS

## LONG WALLS

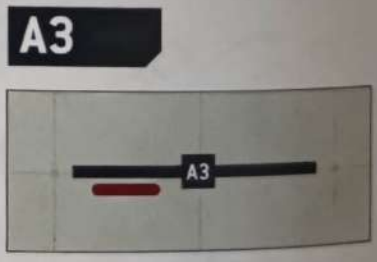
### LONG WALL



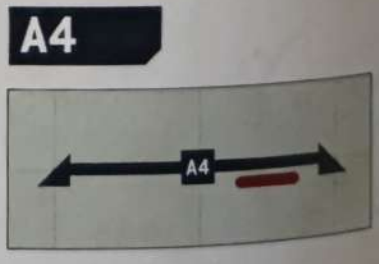

### LONG WALL WITH PILLARS




### LONG WALL WITH HATCHWAY

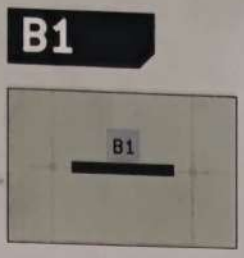



### LONG WALL WITH HATCHWAY AND PILLARS

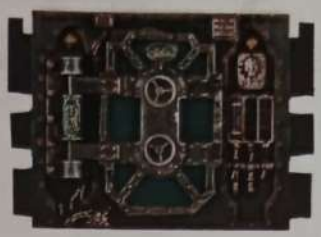


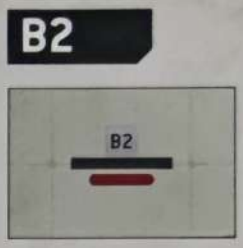
# SHORT WALLS

## SHORT WALL




## SHORT WALL WITH HATCHWAY

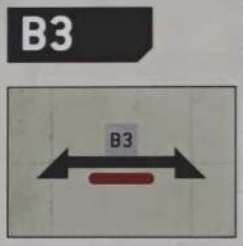





## SHORT WALL WITH HATCHWAY AND PILLARS

Type 1

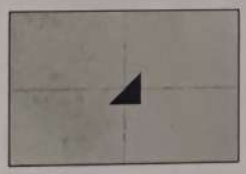
Type 2



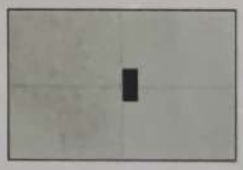

## PILLAR

Left Pillar

Right Pillar

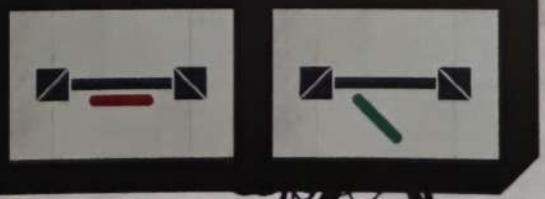


## WALL END



## HATCHWAY POSITIONS

The locations of the Hatchways on the mission map are specified by the symbols to the right. This will help you identify the orientation of Walls with Hatchways.



# KILLZONE UPGRADE: SHADOWVAULTS

Some missions in this book support the Killzone Upgrade: Shadowvaults set. If you have this, then you can incorporate its components into your games. When mustering your Boarding Patrol for such a mission, you can add the upgrades listed below by paying the appropriate points costs for them (even though some of them have the **VEHICLE** keyword and do not share a Faction keyword with the rest of your Boarding Patrol). The mission you are playing will specify whether you have access to the Attacker's or Defender's upgrades (such upgrades will not take up a Battlefield Role slot). Note that all of these missions are designed to be balanced, whether you use these upgrades or not, but they can add an extra level of environmental immersion to your games.

## DEFENDER'S UPGRADES

If you have access to the Defender's Upgrades, you can take up to one Sentry Turret and up to two Searchlights for the points shown below.

| Sentry Turret | |
|---|---|
| Unit size | 1 model |
| Unit cost | 30 pts |

| Searchlight | |
|---|---|
| Unit size | 1 model |
| Unit cost | 10 pts |

### SENTRY TURRET

| Name | M | WS | BS | S | T | W | A | Ld | Sv |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sentry Turret | - | - | 5+ | 4 | 4 | 3 | - | 10 | 4+ |

A Sentry Turret is equipped with: twin heavy bolter.

| WEAPON | RANGE | TYPE | S | AP | D | ABILITIES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Twin heavy bolter | 36" | Heavy 6 | 5 | -1 | 2 | - |

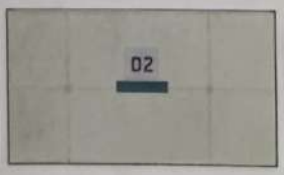
**ABILITIES**

**Defensive Emplacement:** Before the battle, in the Create the Battlefield and Place Objective Markers step, set this model up in one of the Sentry Turret positions, marked D1 on the mission map.

FACTION KEYWORDS: **UNALIGNED**
KEYWORDS: **VEHICLE, SENTRY TURRET**

**D1**

**D2**




### SEARCHLIGHT

**Wall:** This model is a terrain feature and counts as a Wall.

**Camera Network:** Before the battle, in the Create the Battlefield and Place Objective Markers step, set this terrain feature up in one of the searchlight positions, marked D2 on the mission map, that does not already contain a Searchlight.

**Enemy Spotted:** Each time you select targets for a ranged attack made by a friendly model, if the target is within 9" of and visible to any Searchlights from your army, re-roll a hit roll of 1, and, if the model making the attack is a Sentry Turret, add 1 to that attack's hit roll.

# ATTACKER'S UPGRADES

If you have access to the Attacker's Upgrades, you can take up to one Breaching Robot for the points shown below.

| Breaching Robot | |
|---|---|
| Unit size | 1 model |
| Unit cost | 35 pts |

## BREACHING ROBOT

| Name | M | WS | BS | S | T | W | A | Ld | Sv |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Breaching Robot | 6" | 4+ | - | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 4+ |

A Breaching Robot is equipped with: cutting blade; cutting gear.

| WEAPON | RANGE | TYPE | S | AP | D | ABILITIES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cutting blade | Melee | Melee | User | -2 | 1 | - |

| OTHER WARGEAR | ABILITIES |
|---|---|
| Cutting gear | Each time the bearer finishes a Normal Move, you can open one Hatchway that is within 1" of it. Your opponent cannot attempt to prevent that Hatchway from opening. |
| Bomb kit | In your Command phase, the bearer can trigger its bomb. If it does so:<br>• Open each Hatchway that is within 3" of it. Your opponent cannot attempt to prevent those Hatchways from opening and those Hatchways cannot be closed again.<br>• Roll one D6 for each other unit within 3" of and visible to this model: on a 2+, that unit suffers 1 mortal wound. This model is then destroyed.<br>When the bearer is destroyed (other than through triggering its bomb), roll one D6 before removing it from play. On a 6, it explodes, and each unit within 3" of and visible to it suffers 1 mortal wound. |

### WARGEAR OPTIONS

- This model's cutting blade and cutting gear can be replaced with 1 bomb kit.

### ABILITIES

**Assault Robot:** Before the battle, in the Deploy Armies step, when setting up a unit from your army within an Entry Zone, you can set this unit up alongside that unit as if it was a part of it, using the same Entry Zone.

**Limited Loadout:** This model cannot attempt to close Hatchways and is ignored for the purpose of controlling objective markers.

FACTION KEYWORDS: **UNALIGNED**
KEYWORDS: **VEHICLE, BREACHING ROBOT**

## SCOUR THE DARKNESS

# FIND THE SIGNAL DATA

## MISSION BRIEFING

*An Inquisitorial way station with knowledge of the Rock's location is stormed. The forces of Chaos have breached it, slaughtering all in their path. They are here for one reason: the data stored within the way station's infocores.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74), and the Chaos player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75).

**Rapid Offence:** The Chaos player has the first turn.

**Hide the Intel:** Before the battle, at the start of the Deploy Armies step, the Imperium player must secretly select one of the objective markers to hide the intel within. That player should make a note of this.

**Search the Terminal:** Units from the Chaos player's army can perform the following action:

**Search the Terminal (Action):** One or more units can start to perform this Action at the end of the Move Units step of your Movement phase if they are within range of an objective marker. The action is completed at the end of the turn. If completed, the Imperium player must reveal if that objective marker contains the intel. If it does not: remove that objective marker from the battlefield; otherwise, remove all other objective markers from the battlefield and make a note that the unit that performed this action is carrying a copy of the intel. Note that other units from the Chaos player's army can continue to perform this action on that objective marker in order to gain their own copy of the intel.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of whether the Chaos player identifies which objective marker contained the intel, and if so, in which battle round they did this in. How quickly the Chaos player is able to find the intel will affect on how quickly they can move against the Rock. This will have an impact on the Drastic Defence mission (pg 82).

## OBJECTIVES

### PICK IT CLEAN

***End Game Objective***

*The forces of Chaos will stop at nothing to glean the knowledge of where the Rock can be located.*

At the end of the battle, the Chaos player scores 30 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 90 victory points):

- They identified which objective marker contained the intel.
- They have one or more units left alive at the end of the battle that have a copy of the intel.
- They have two or more units left alive at the end of the battle that have a copy of the intel.

### BLOODY DELAY

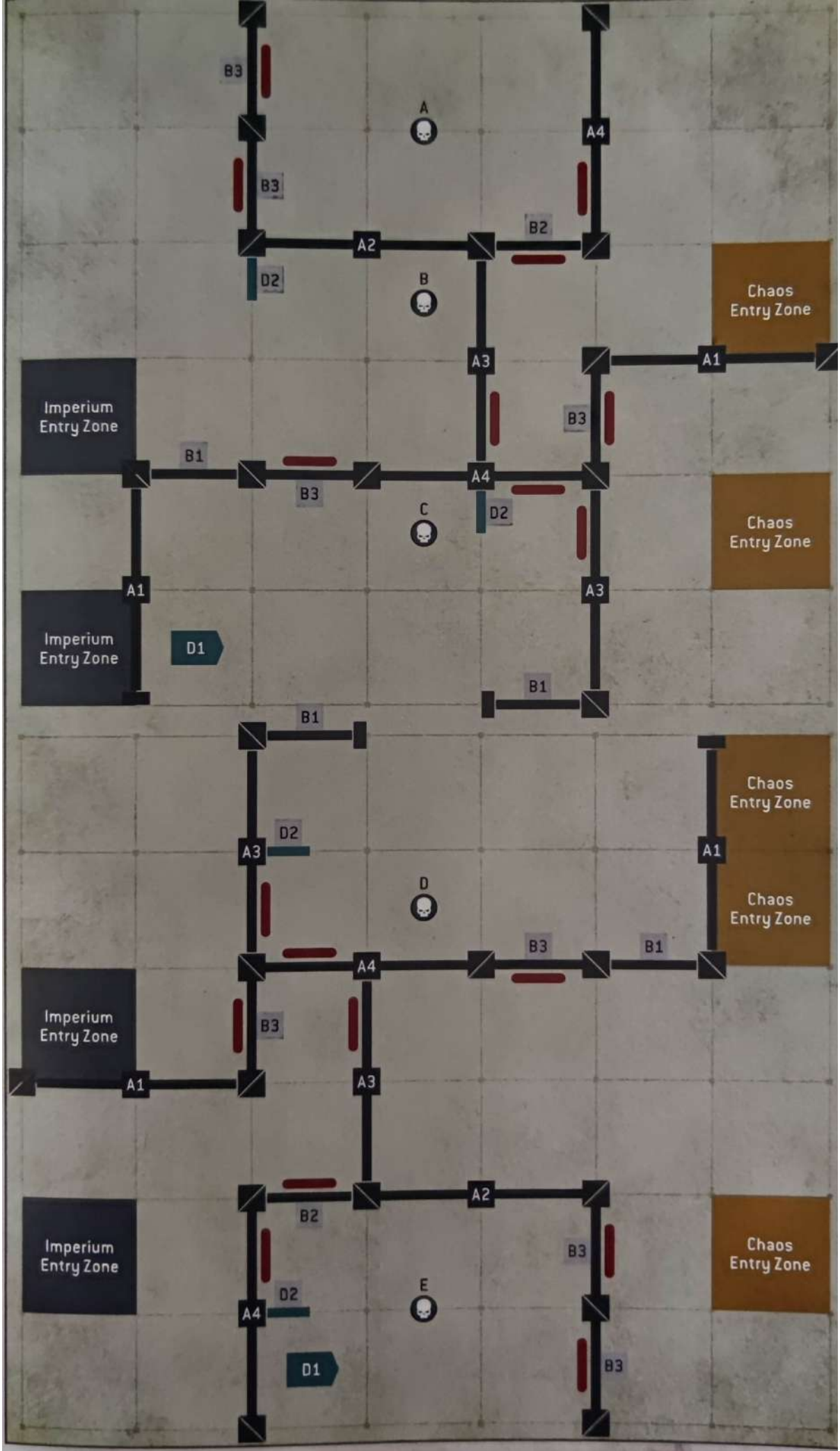
***End Game Objective***

*Agents of the Inquisition will fight to the death to prevent the forces of Chaos from accessing their databanks and intelligence archives. Even if every last one of them be slain, their sacrifice will slow down the heretics and thwart their plans at least for a time.*

At the end of the battle, the Imperium player scores the number of victory points shown in the table below, based on when the Chaos player identified which objective marker contained the intel.

**VITAL INTEL**

| BATTLE ROUND INTEL IDENTIFIED | VICTORY POINTS SCORED |
|---|---|
| 2 | 35 |
| 3 | 55 |
| 4 | 70 |
| 5 | 80 |
| Never | 90 |


B3
A
A4
B3
B2
A2
D2
B
Chaos Entry Zone
A3
A1
Imperium Entry Zone
B3
B1
A4
B3
C
D2
Chaos Entry Zone
A1
A3
Imperium Entry Zone
D1
B1
B1
Chaos Entry Zone
D2
A3
A1
D
Chaos Entry Zone
B3
B1
A4
Imperium Entry Zone
B3
A1
A3
A2
B2
Imperium Entry Zone
B3
Chaos Entry Zone
D2
E
A4
D1
B3

WAR IN THE WARP

# TAKE THE TELEPORTARIUM

## MISSION BRIEFING

*The fighting aboard the ship has reached a critical juncture, with fierce, bloody battle raging around vital enginarium and teleportarium locations. Should the former fall, the forces of Chaos will have the means to deny power to vital ship functions. Should the latter fall to the heretics, they will have the means to rapidly reinforce multiple areas of the war zone. The Emperor's loyal warriors must stop at nothing to ensure the forces of Chaos are thwarted.*

## MISSION RULES

**Separate Locations:** When setting up the battlefield, each game board represents a different location within the ship. It is not possible to move units from one game board to another unless using the Activate Teleportarium action (see below), and units on one game board cannot affect units on the other.

**Activate Teleportarium:** Units from your army can perform the following action:

**Activate Teleportarium (Action):** One unit from your army can start this action at the start of your Command phase if it is within the Teleportarium Control Zone. The action is completed at the end of your next Movement phase. If successfully completed, select one friendly unit within the Teleportarium and remove it from the battlefield. Set that unit up on the battlefield anywhere within the Enginarium and not within 9" of any enemy models. Until the end of the turn, that unit cannot move.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle and secured ultimate control over the teleportarium controls. This will have an impact on the Geller Field Collapse mission (pg 80).

## OBJECTIVES

### FEROCIOUS CONTEST

***Progressive Objective***

*It is imperative that at no point the enemy be left unmolested in the teleportarium. The disruption of battle will surely prevent them from exploiting its powerful capabilities. They must be kept under relentless pressure.*

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers in the Teleportarium.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control three or more objective markers.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points).

### ABSOLUTE CONTROL

***End Game Objective***

*Both forces seek total control of the teleportarium. With an uncontested hold over this powerful strategic asset, they can bring greater strength to bear in other areas of the battle, turning the tide in their favour.*

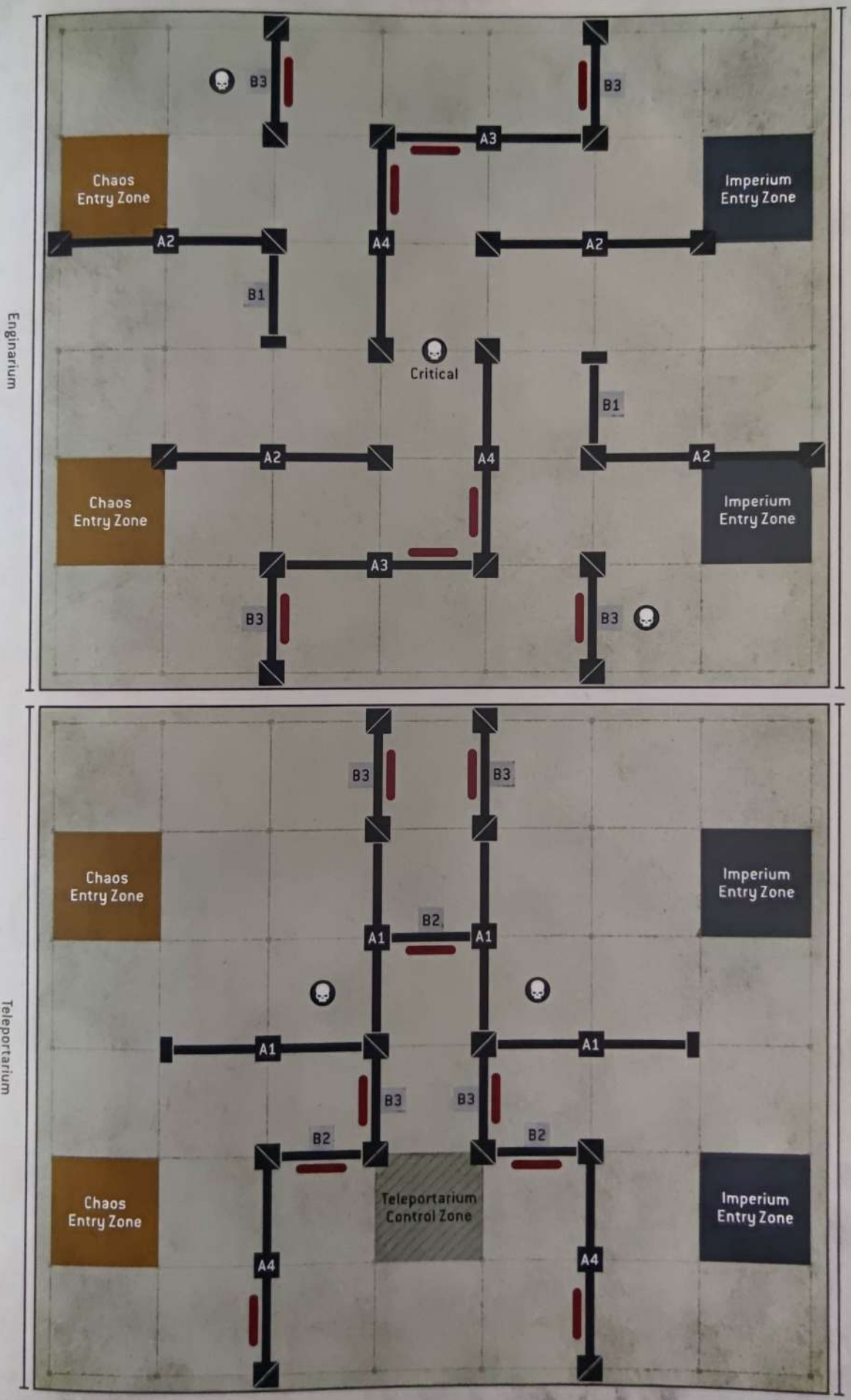
At the end of the battle, if one player has one or more units within the Teleportarium and their opponent does not, they score 15 victory points.

### MASTERY

***End Game Objective***

*Whoever controls the critical node in the enginarium has the ability to restrict power to multiple essential systems.*

At the end of the battle, if one player controls the Critical objective marker, they score 15 victory points.


Enginarium
B3
B3
A3
Chaos Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
A2
A4
A2
B1
Critical
B1
A2
A4
A2
Chaos Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
A3
B3
B3
Enginarium
Teleportarium
B3
B3
Chaos Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
B2
A1
A1
A1
A1
B3
B3
B2
B2
Chaos Entry Zone
Teleportarium Control Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
A4
A4
Teleportarium

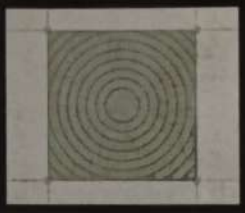
## WAR IN THE WARP

# GELLER FIELD COLLAPSE

## MISSION BRIEFING

*The forces of Chaos have succeeded in collapsing the Geller field generators, exposing the ship to the raw power of the empyrean. Warp energy runs rampant through corridors and chambers and the laws of realspace cease to function. For the Imperial defenders it is imperative the Geller fields be restored. For the heretics who oppose them, all they have to do is stop the lackeys of the False Emperor and the ship is doomed.*

**Warp Tear Zone:** Warp tears open intermittently in these Zones, creating connected tunnels between them that allow units to travel through and shoot at targets on the other side.



## MISSION RULES

**Empyric Strike:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, before the battle, at the start of the Deploy Armies step, the player who won the Take the Teleportarium mission can select one of their units to set up in a teleportarium chamber instead of setting it up on the battlefield. If they do so, then in the Reinforcements step of one of their Movement phases they can set up that unit anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 9" away from any enemy models.

**Warp Tears:** From the second battle round onwards, at the start of the battle round, roll one D3 and, until the end of the battle round, the two Warp Tear Zones shown in the table below are connected to one another. When two Warp Tear Zones are connected, they are said to form a Warp Tunnel.

**WARP TEARS**

| D3 | WARP TEAR ZONES CONNECTED |
|---|---|
| 1 | A and E |
| 2 | B and D |
| 3 | C and F |

**Warp Transit:** In the Movement phase, each time a unit ends a move (excluding Remaining Stationary), if every model in that unit is within a connected Warp Tear Zone, that unit can travel through it. If it does, remove that unit from the battlefield and set it back up with each model within the Warp Tear Zone at the other end of the Warp Tunnel. This can allow a unit to be set up within Engagement Range of enemy units. If this happens, then those units will be eligible to fight during the subsequent Fight phase, but none of them will count as having made a charge move this turn.

**Warpshift:** Each time a model makes a ranged attack, if a connected Warp Tear Zone is visible to it, that model can make that ranged attack through it so long as there is not any friendly units within the Warp Tear Zone at the other end of the Warp Tunnel. If that model does so:

- When determining which units are visible to that model, check visibility from any point within the Warp Tear Zone at the other end of the Warp Tunnel.
- When measuring the distance to an enemy unit, the distance is the combined total of the distance from the attacking model to the Warp Tear Zone it is shooting through and the distance from the Warp Tear Zone at the other end of the Warp Tunnel to the target.
- If there are any enemy units within the Warp Tear Zone at the other end of the Warp Tunnel, that attack must be made against one of those units.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle. If the Chaos player wins, the ship is destroyed in the warp, but if the Imperium player wins it will be able to return later to aid in the defence of the Rock. This will have an impact on the Retake the Elevator mission (pg 88).

## OBJECTIVES

### GELLER FIELDS SECURE

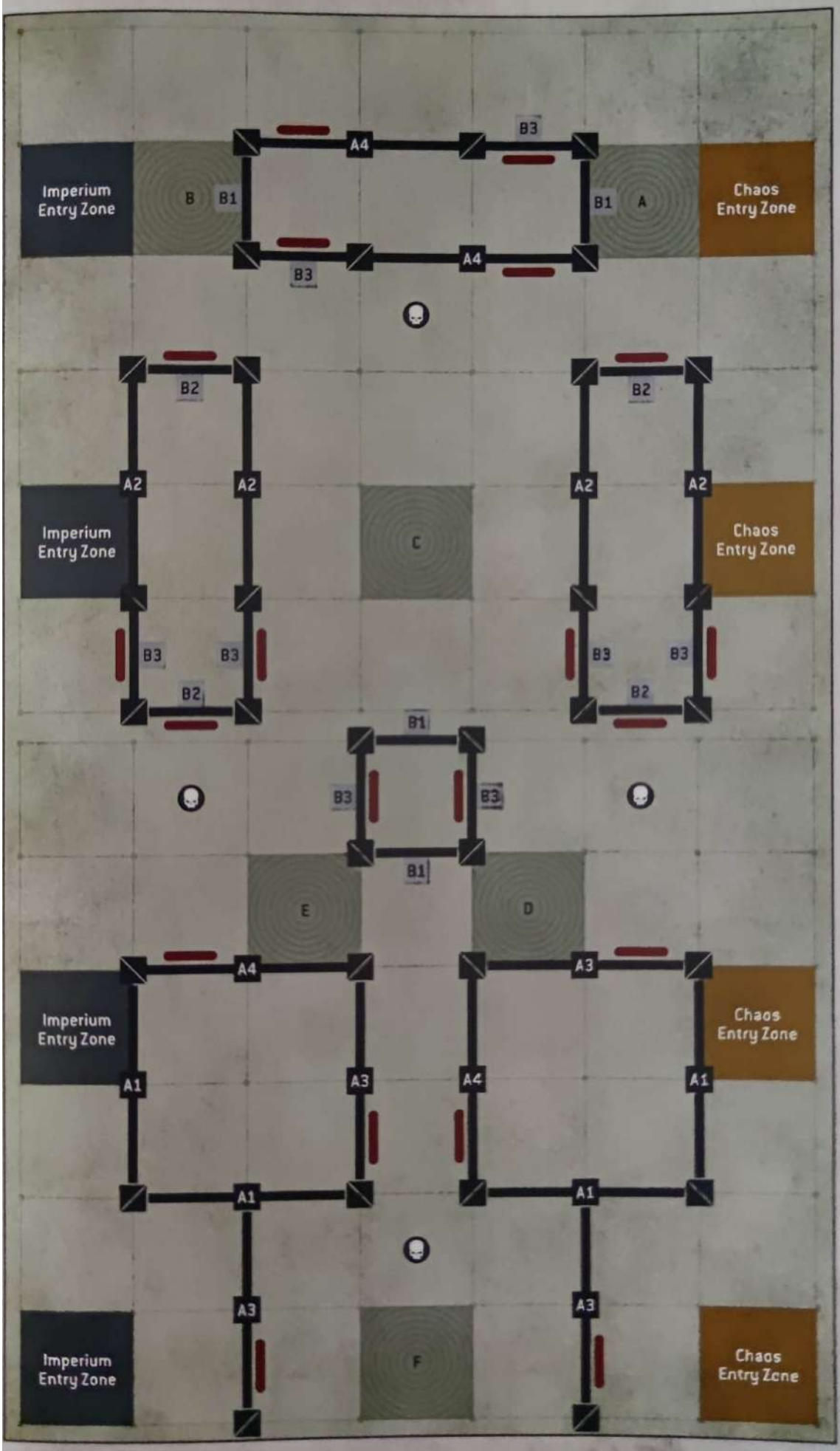
***Progressive Objective***

*The fate of the ship will be decided by the victor of the battle.*

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy. In the fifth battle round, the player whose turn it is scores 10 victory points for each of the conditions instead:

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the of their turn, they score 10 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy.


Imperium Entry Zone
B
B1
A4
B3
B1
A
Chaos Entry Zone
B3
A4
B2
A2
A2
Imperium Entry Zone
C
B2
A2
A2
Chaos Entry Zone
B3
B3
B2
B2
B3
B3
B2
B1
B3
B3
B1
E
D
Imperium Entry Zone
A4
A3
A1
A3
A4
A1
Chaos Entry Zone
A1
A1
A3
A3
Imperium Entry Zone
F
Chaos Entry Zone

# FALL OF THE ROCK
# DRASTIC DEFENCE

## MISSION BRIEFING

*Having recovered the data of the Rock's position, the forces of Chaos have attacked the Dark Angels' fortress monastery and achieved surprise over its defenders. Desperately racing to throw back their attackers, the Rock's garrison is hurriedly establishing defensive positions from which to blunt the heretics' assault and launch the counter-attacks to drive them from the Rock forever.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74), and the Chaos player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75).

**Preparedness:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, before the battle, in the Generate Starting Command Points step, the Imperium player starts with the additional number of Command points shown in the table below based on the outcome of the Find the Signal Data mission (pg 76).

| PREPAREDNESS | |
|---|---|
| BATTLE ROUND THE CHAOS PLAYER IDENTIFIED THE OBJECTIVE CONTAINING THE INTEL | IMPERIUM PLAYER ADDITIONAL COMMAND POINTS |
| 1-2 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 5/Did Not Identify | 3 |

**Erect Defences:** Before the battle, at the start of the Deploy Armies step, the Imperium player selects one of the objective markers shown on the deployment map. Remove that objective marker from the battlefield (this objective marker does not count as having been overrun, see below), and, when the Imperium player is setting up their units, they cannot use the Entry Zones adjacent to that objective marker.

**Forward Positions:** Before the battle, the Imperium player cannot set up any units from their army within their Backup Entry Zones. Once the first battle round has started, they can only use these Backup Entry Zones when setting up any Strategic Reserve units from their army in an Entry Zone.

**Hold At All Costs:** For each objective marker on the battlefield, if, at the end of the turn there are no models from the Imperium player's army within range of that objective marker and it is controlled by the Chaos player, then that objective marker is overrun, and is removed from the battlefield.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle. If the Imperium player wins, they will have bought valuable time for their fellow defenders to reach their regrouping points before being overrun, but if the Chaos player wins, they will be able to push through the outer defences of the Rock at a more rapid pace. This will have an impact on the Rapid Withdrawal mission (pg 84).

## OBJECTIVES

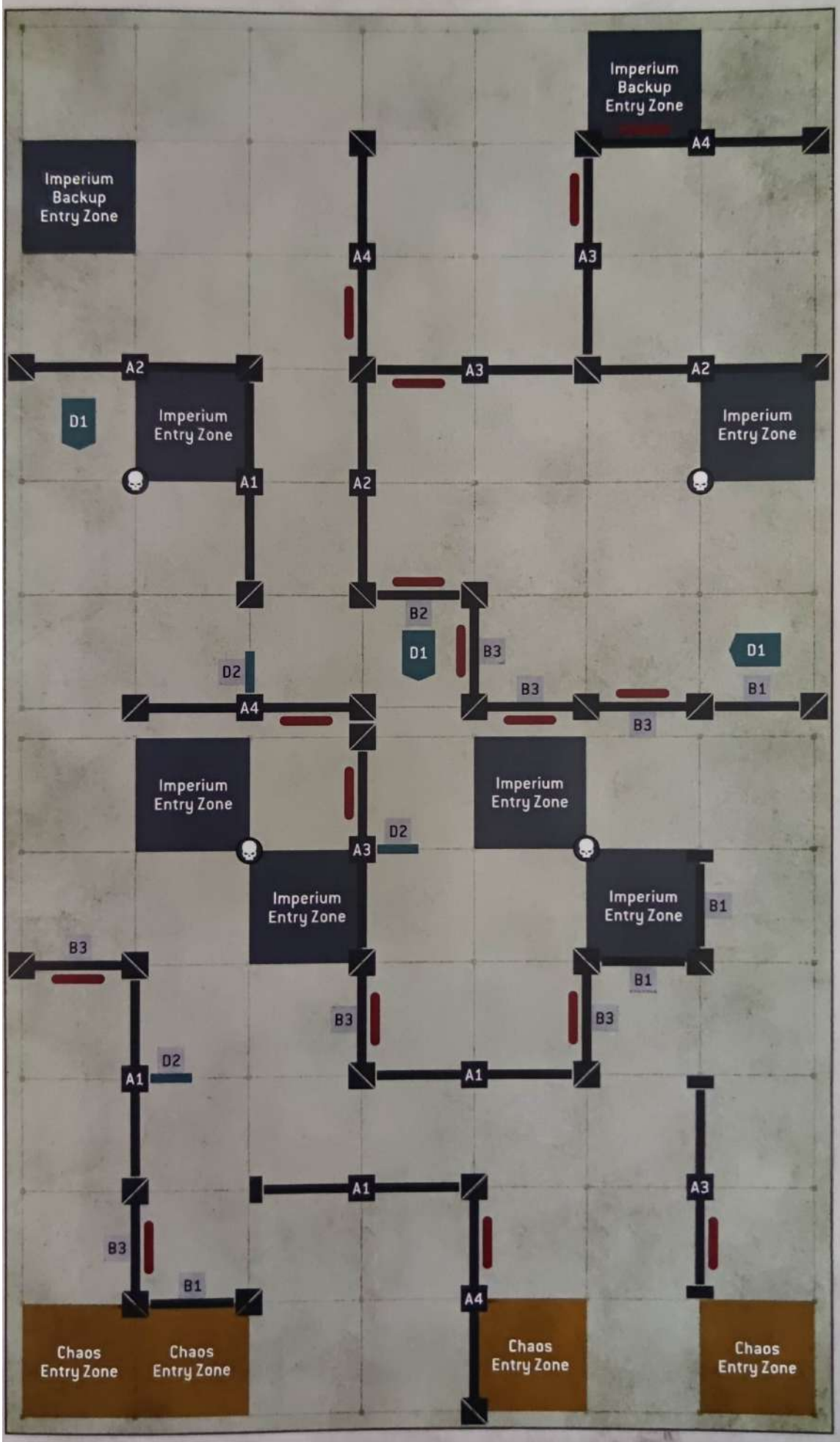
### IN THE LION'S NAME, STAND FIRM

***End Game Objective***

*The defenders will fight with a fury even they did not know they possessed to hold their ground and slaughter their foul attackers.*

At the end of the battle:

- The Imperium player scores 30 victory points for each objective marker that remains on the battlefield.
- The Chaos player scores 30 victory points for each objective marker that was overrun.


Imperium Backup Entry Zone
Imperium Backup Entry Zone
A4
A4
A3
A2
A3
A2
D1
Imperium Entry Zone
A1
A2
Imperium Entry Zone
B2
D1
B3
D1
D2
A4
B3
B1
B3
Imperium Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
A3
D2
Imperium Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
B1
B3
B1
B3
B3
A1
A1
D2
A1
A3
B3
B1
A4
Chaos Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone

# FALL OF THE ROCK
# RAPID WITHDRAWAL

## MISSION BRIEFING

*The hordes of Chaos drive ever deeper into the Rock. A force of defenders deployed to stall the heretics' advance is close to becoming encircled by the rapidly encroaching traitors, and the time has come for them to withdraw.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74), and the Chaos player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75).

**Fall Back:** The Imperium player has the first turn. In addition, units from the Imperium player's army are eligible to shoot in a turn in which they Fell Back; if they do so, then until the end of the turn, each time a model in that unit makes a ranged attack, it requires an unmodified hit roll of 6 to score a successful hit against the target.

**Trapped:** Other than setting them up in Strategic Reserves, the Chaos player cannot make use of any rules that allow units to be set up anywhere other than on the battlefield. The Imperium player cannot make use of any rules that allow a unit to be set up anywhere other than on the battlefield and cannot set up any units in Strategic Reserves – if they have more units than they are able to set up on the battlefield, then those units do not partake in the battle (but do not count as destroyed).

**Encirclement:** The Chaos player cannot use the Initial Reinforcements or Later Reinforcements Entry Zones until the battle rounds shown in the table below. If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign and the Chaos player won the Drastic Defence mission (pg 82), they will be able to use these Entry Zones in earlier battle rounds as shown.

**ENCIRCLEMENT**

| ENTRY ZONE | BATTLE ROUNDS IT CAN BE USED IN | |
|---|---|---|
| | CHAOS PLAYER WON DRASTIC DEFENCE (PG 82) | OTHERWISE |
| Initial Reinforcements | 1+ (Not before the battle) | 2+ |
| Later Reinforcements | 2+ | 3+ |

**They're Everywhere:** In the Chaos player's Movement phase, at the start of the Reinforcement step, if they have no Strategic Reserves units, they can select one Boarding Squad from their army that has been destroyed and place it into Strategic Reserves with all of its models having their full wounds remaining.

**It's Too Late for Them:** Each time a Morale test is taken for a unit from the Imperium player's army, it is automatically passed.

**The Doors are Sealed:** Units cannot perform the Operate Hatchway action on the Hatchways labelled 1 to 6. Starting in the third battle round, at the start of each battle round, the Imperium player rolls one D6, and for each objective marker they control they can add 1 to the roll or subtract 1 from the roll: if the Hatchway whose label corresponds to that result is closed, open it.

**Escape:** At the end of the Imperium player's turn, they can choose for any units from their army that are within any Escape Zones to escape. For any that do, remove those units from the battlefield, they count as having escaped and have not been destroyed.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, at the start of the first battle round, that player can select one unit from their army and it can make a Normal Move of up to 6".

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle. If the Imperium player wins, more of their troops will have escaped to prepare future traps and ambushes for the Chaos player's forces. This will have an impact on the Desperate Holdout mission (pg 86).

## OBJECTIVES

### RUN THEM DOWN

***Progressive Objective***

*Every dead defender weakens defences yet to be reached.*

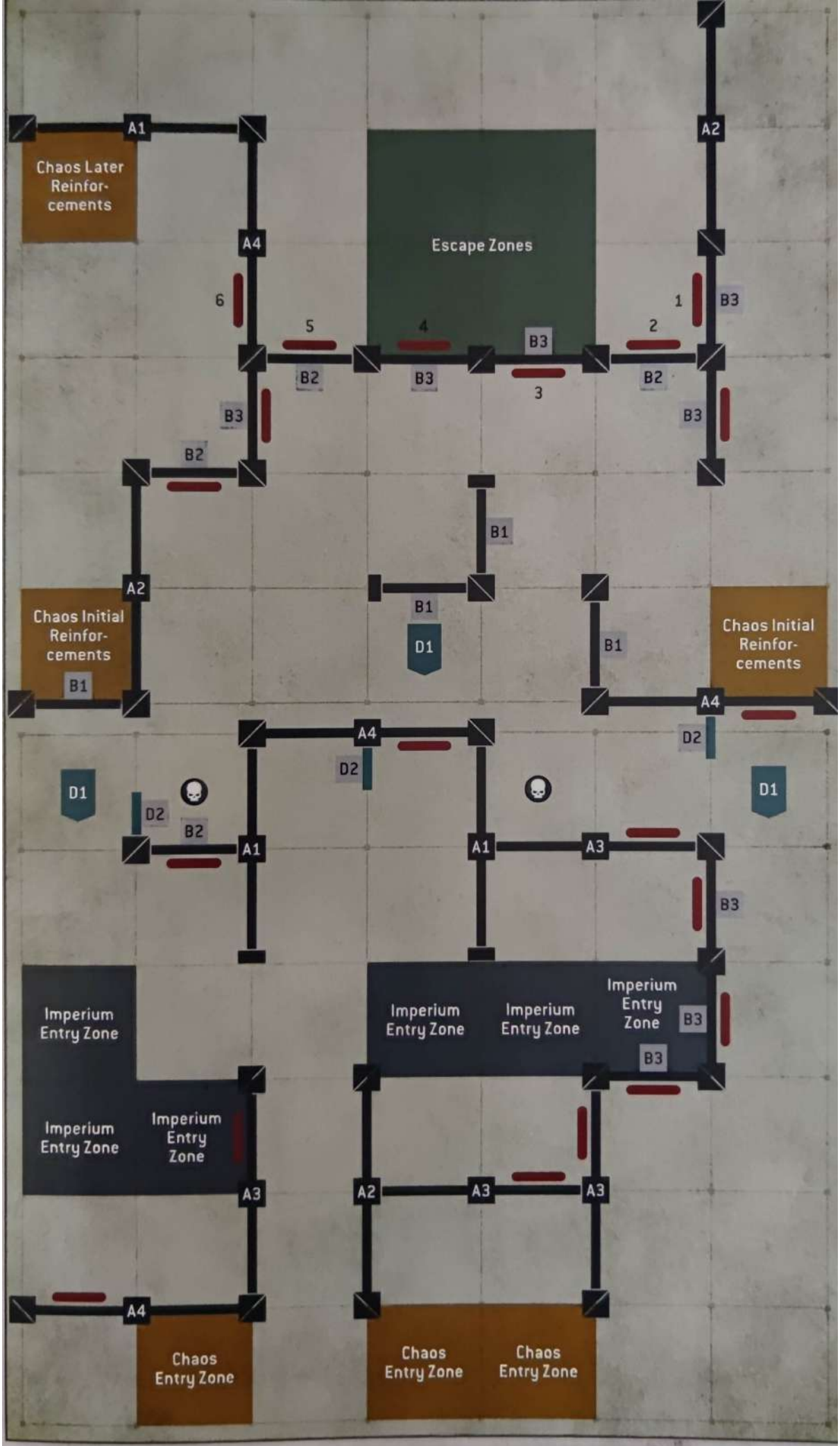
Each time a unit from the Imperium player's army is destroyed, the Chaos player scores 10 victory points.

### LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

***Progressive Objective***

*Every defender who escapes is one more to man the barricades.*

Each time a unit from the Imperium player's army escapes, they score 15 victory points. If that unit was not below Half-strength, the Imperium player scores an additional 5 victory points.


Chaos Later Reinforcements
Escape Zones
Chaos Initial Reinforcements
Chaos Initial Reinforcements
Imperium Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone
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Imperium Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
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Chaos Entry Zone
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# FALL OF THE ROCK
# DESPERATE HOLDOUT

## MISSION BRIEFING

*There is nowhere left to retreat to. This is the final line of defence. As the forces of Chaos move in for the kill, it is time for the defenders to make their last stand. They must achieve victory, or they will be slaughtered.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74), and the Chaos player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75).

**Mine the Hatches:** Before the battle, at the start of the Deploy Armies step, for each half of the battlefield, the Imperium player secretly selects four Hatchways within that battlefield half to sabotage and makes a note of their selections.

When playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, if the Imperium player was victorious in the Rapid Withdrawal mission (pg 84), they can sabotage one additional door within each battlefield half.

Each time a unit from the Chaos player's army opens a Hatchway, if that Hatchway has not been opened before, the Imperium player must reveal if it was sabotaged. If it was, roll one D6: on a 2+, that unit suffers 1 mortal wound and, until the end of the Chaos player's next Movement phase, halve the Move characteristic of models in that unit and those models cannot make ranged attacks.

**Beleaguered Reinforcements:** Before the battle, when setting up units from their army, the Imperium player can only set up units on the battlefield using the Holdout Entry Zones (they cannot use the Backup Entry Zones). In addition, Strategic Reserves units from the Imperium player's army cannot be set up on the battlefield in the first battle round, and when they are, they can only use the Backup Entry Zones.

**Push Through:** The Chaos player has the first turn.

**Ready and Waiting:** At the start of the battle, units from the Imperium player's army count as having Set Overwatch and Set to Defend. Until the start of the Imperium player's first turn, those units also count as Holding Steady.

**Null Blockers:** In the Reinforcements step of the Chaos player's Movement phase, each time they set up a unit on the battlefield, that unit cannot be set up within 9" of any objective markers or within 9" of any of the Imperium player's Entry Zones.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle. If the Chaos player wins, they will have dealt a devastating blow to the Rock's defenders, earning the favour of their Chaos masters. This will have an impact on the Hunt the Damned mission (pg 90).

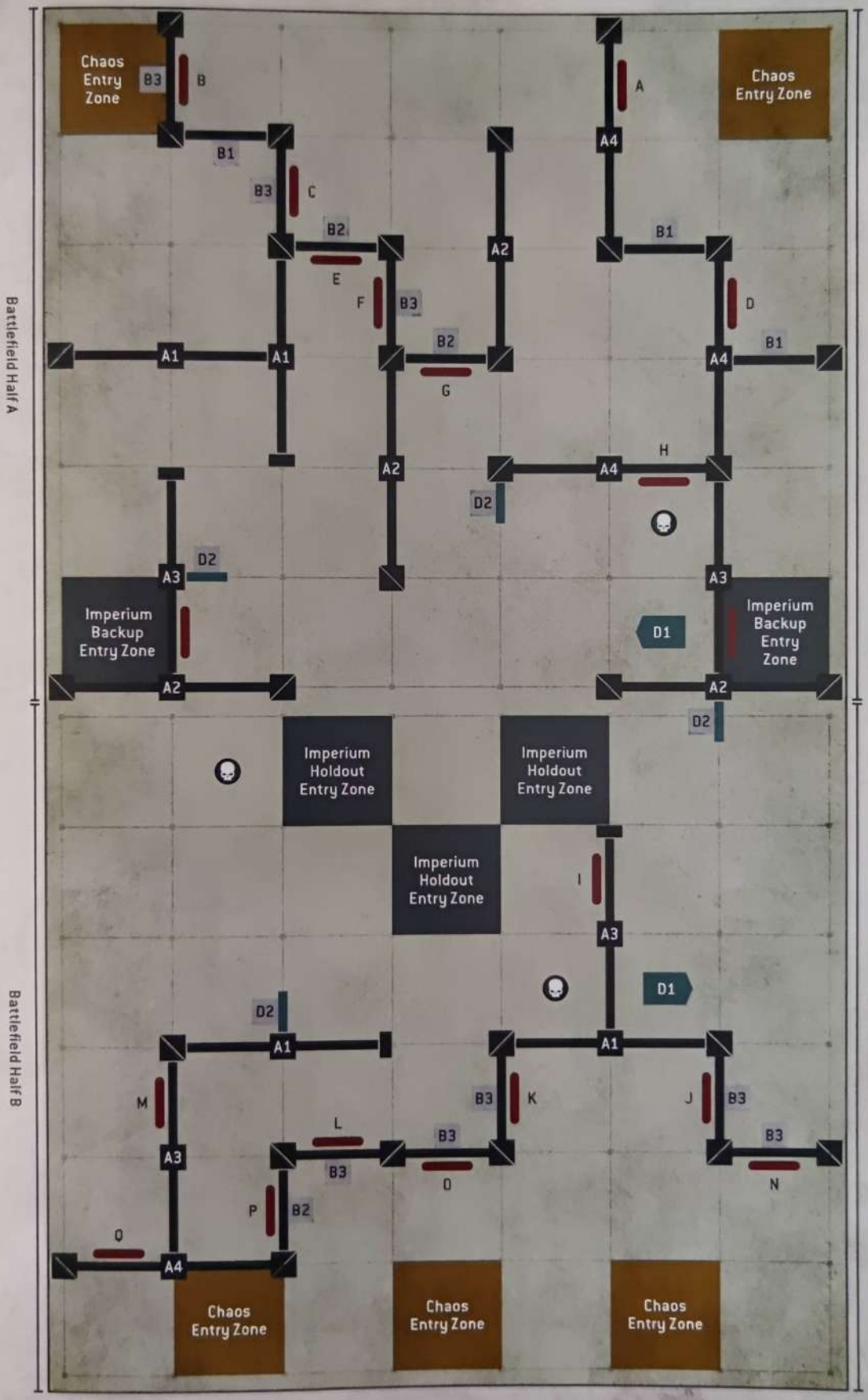
## OBJECTIVES

### GIVE NOTHING, TAKE EVERYTHING

***End Game Objective***

*The loyalists refuse to die cowards and without forcing the attackers to pay a heavy price. The heretics scent blood and victory in the air, and know all they must do is win one final battle.*

At the end of the battle, each player scores 30 victory points for each objective marker they control.


Battlefield Half A
Battlefield Half B
Chaos Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
Imperium Backup Entry Zone
Imperium Backup Entry Zone
Imperium Holdout Entry Zone
Imperium Holdout Entry Zone
Imperium Holdout Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
Chaos Entry Zone
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RECLAMATION

# RETAKE THE ELEVATOR

## MISSION BRIEFING

*The defenders of the Rock are on the counter-attack, eager to kill the invaders of their fortress. To reclaim fallen levels, they turn to an elevator which will grant them swift access. Unsuspecting of attack, the heretics guarding the lift are little prepared for what is coming.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75), and the Chaos player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74).

**Lift Defenders:** Before the battle, the Chaos player cannot set up any units from their army within their Lift Entry Zones. Once the first battle round has started, they can only use these Lift Entry Zones when setting up any Strategic Reserve units from their army in an Entry Zone.

**Teleportarium:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, and the Imperium player won the Geller Field Collapse mission (pg 80), during deployment they can select one unit from their army and set up this unit in a teleportarium chamber instead of setting it up on the battlefield. If they do so, when that unit arrives from Strategic Reserves, they can set it up either wholly within one of their Entry Zones, or anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 9" away from any enemy models.

**Emplaced Defenders:** Before the battle, after Determining Reserves, the Chaos player decides who has the first turn.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, make a note of which player wins the battle. If the Imperium player wins, they will have pushed through and seized the lift early, allowing them to get reinforcements to the upper levels of the Rock much earlier. This will have an impact on the Hunt the Damned mission (pg 90).

## OBJECTIVES

### SECURE AND PACIFY

***Progressive Objective***

*For the Rock's defenders, securing the elevator will give them swift and easy access to swathes of their fortress to retake it from the invaders. For the heretics trying to stop them, all of their hard-won gains will be at risk if they lose control of the elevator.*

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy. In the fifth battle round, the player whose turn it is scores 10 victory points for each of the conditions instead:

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead at the of their turn, they score 10 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy.

### PURGE THE UPPER LEVELS

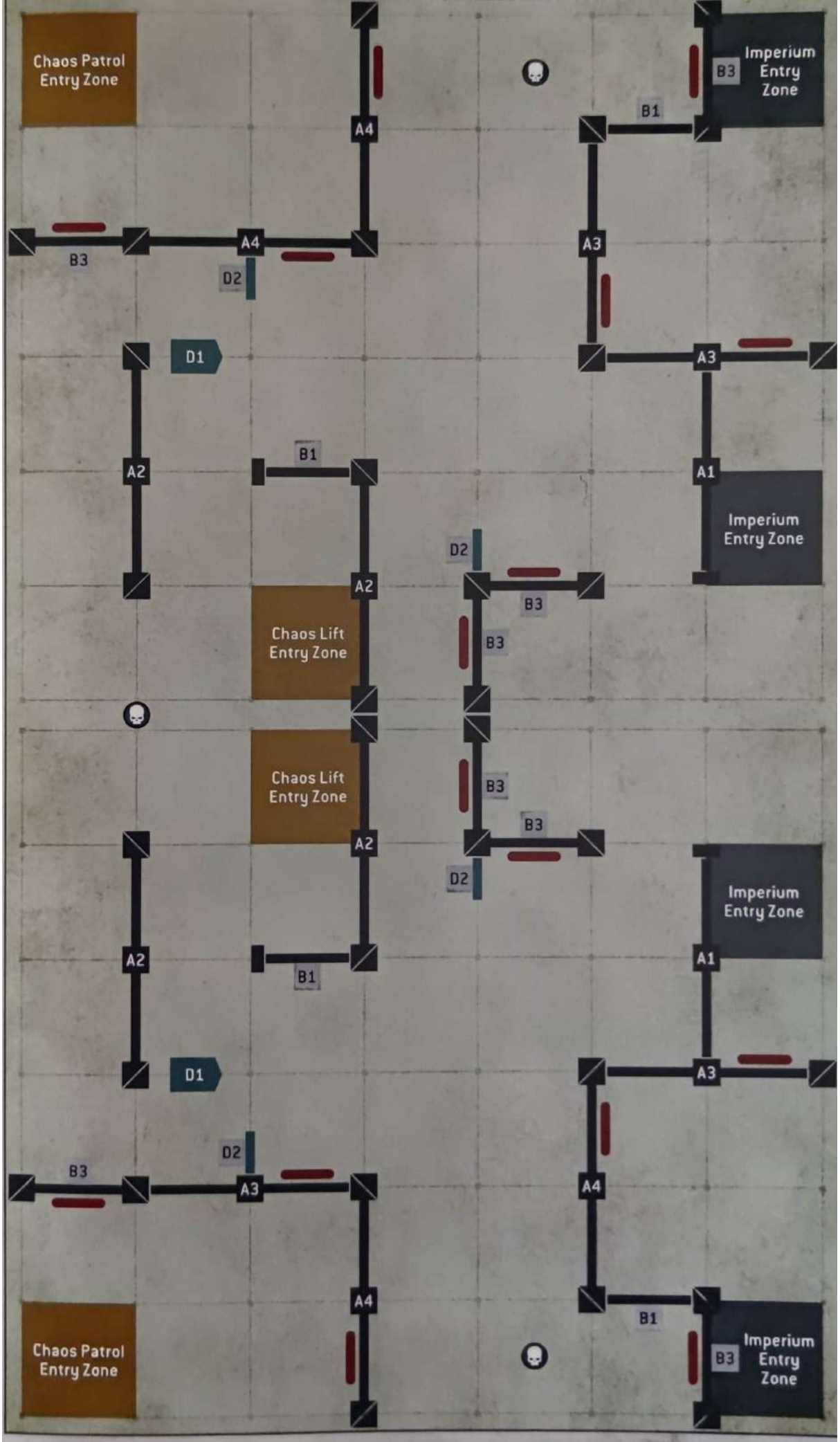
***End Game Objective***

*Stopping at nothing, the defenders of the Rock storm the elevator's access area, determined to eliminate the traitors protecting it and eager to advance into upper levels of the Rock to purge it of heretics.*

At the end of the battle, if there are any units from the Imperium player's army that have every model in them within one of the Lift Entry Zones, the Imperium player scores 30 victory points. Otherwise, the Chaos player scores 30 victory points.

*'War aboard a void ship or within a star fort is no simple matter. One fights within a three-dimensional labyrinth replete with entangled passageways, turbolifts, transit networks, airlocks, servo-shrines and the Dark-Gods-alone know what else. Attack can come from any direction, at any moment, and those who persist in thinking in straight lines will never see it coming. This is where duplicitous souls such as we thrive.''*

- Hathakor the Cruel, veteran Black Legionnaire


Chaos Patrol Entry Zone
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Imperium Entry Zone
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Imperium Entry Zone
D2
A2
B3
Chaos Lift Entry Zone
B3
Chaos Lift Entry Zone
B3
A2
B3
D2
A2
Imperium Entry Zone
A1
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A3
D1
D2
B3
A3
A4
A4
B1
Chaos Patrol Entry Zone
B3
Imperium Entry Zone

# RECLAMATION
# HUNT THE DAMNED

## MISSION BRIEFING

*The forces of Chaos are defeated, yet many of their warriors remain. Like poison they linger. They must be exterminated.*

## MISSION RULES

**Shadowvaults:** In this mission, the Imperium player can use the Attacker's Upgrades (pg 75), and the Chaos player can use the Defender's Upgrades (pg 74).

**Reinforcements from Below:** During deployment, the Imperium player can select up to two units from their army to be set up in the lift instead of setting them up on the battlefield. These units can only be set up in the Lift Entry Zones later in the battle (and no other units can use these Entry Zones). The Imperium player cannot use the Lift Entry Zones when setting up any Strategic Reserve units from their army in an Entry Zone until the third battle round. If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign and the Imperium player won the Retake the Elevator mission (pg 88), they can use the Lift Entry Zones from the second battle round onwards instead.

**Trapped:** Other than setting them up in Strategic Reserves or using the Reinforcements from Below rule, the Imperium player cannot make use of any rules that allow units to be set up anywhere other than on the battlefield. The Chaos player cannot make use of any rules that allow a unit to be set up anywhere other than on the battlefield and cannot set up any units in Strategic Reserves - if they have more units than they are able to set up on the battlefield, then those units do not partake in the battle (but do not count as destroyed).

**Fall Back:** The Chaos player has the first turn. In addition, units from the Chaos player's army are eligible to shoot in a turn in which they Fell Back; if they do so, then until the end of the turn, each time a model in that unit makes a ranged attack, it requires an unmodified hit roll of 6 to score a successful hit against the target.

**Blessed by the Gods:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign and the Chaos player won the Desperate Holdout mission (pg 86), each time a model from a unit in the Chaos player's army would lose a wound, if that unit is within an Escape Zone, roll one D6: on a 5+, that wound is not lost.

**Go to Ground:** At the end of the Chaos player's Command phase, they can choose for any units from their army that have every model within any Escape Zones to escape. For any that do so, remove those units from the battlefield; they count as having escaped and have not been destroyed.

**Underdog Bonus:** If a player receives an Underdog bonus, at the start of the first battle round, that player can select one unit from their army and it can make a Normal Move of up to 6".

**Campaign Outcome:** If playing this battle as part of the Rock Besieged campaign, congratulations; you have reached the end of the campaign! The Chaos forces have dealt a savage blow to the forces of the Imperium, yet the Rock remains in the hands of its rightful owners. The winner of this battle is the overall victor of the campaign, the amount of further destruction wreaked on the fortress as a result being critical in how far back the Imperium war machine has been set.

## OBJECTIVES

### ERADICATE THE INVADERS

***Progressive Objective***

*The defenders seek to wipe out the heretics entirely.*

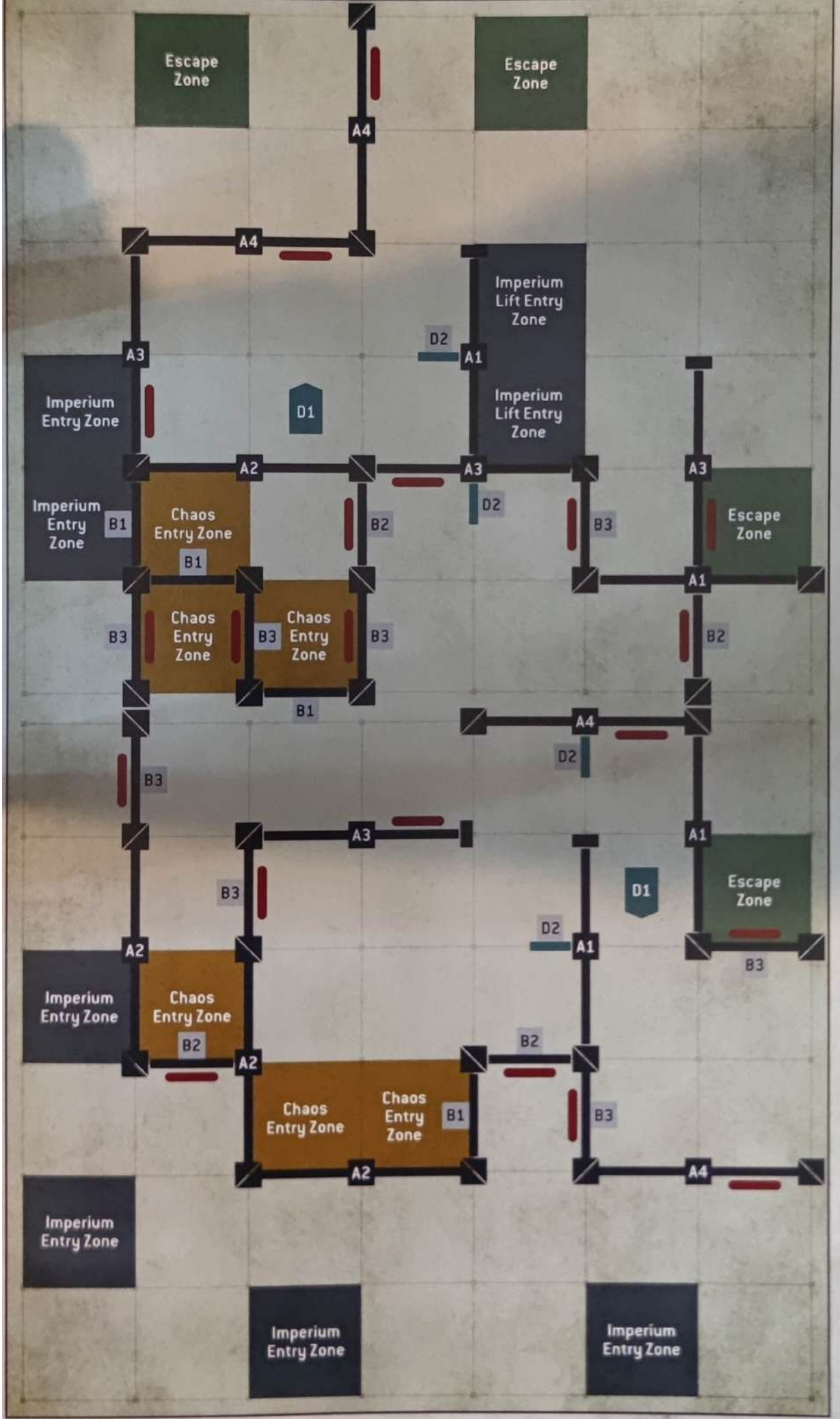
Each time a unit from the Chaos player's army is destroyed, the Imperium player scores 10 victory points.

### GUERILLA WAR

***Progressive Objective***

*Those heretics who survive slink away into the bowels of the Rock.*

Each time a unit from the Chaos player's army escapes, they score 10 victory points. If that unit was not below Half-strength, the Chaos player scores an additional 5 victory points. In addition, if that unit was the Chaos player's **WARLORD**, they score an additional 15 victory points.


Escape Zone
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Imperium Entry Zone
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Chaos Entry Zone
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Imperium Entry Zone
Imperium Entry Zone

## THE ROCK BESIEGED!

Vashtorr the Arkifane, daemon demigod of the soul forges, has fixed his gaze upon the Rock. Somewhere deep within that spacefaring battle station and fortress monastery of the Dark Angels lies an infernal prize that the Arkifane will spend countless lives to seize. Gathering a terrifying Balefleet around him, and riding to battle aboard the most vast and grotesque Ark of Omen yet, Vashtorr closes his ironclad talons around the heart of the Dark Angels Chapter and prepares to crush it.

Yet the Dark Angels are a stubborn and strategically brilliant Chapter. Even in the face of such sudden and calamitous adversity, their grim resolve comes to the fore. Rousing every warrior and weapon at their disposal, the Dark Angels dig in and prepare to fight for every corridor, every echoing chamber, dark oubliette and shadowed stairway. They are led in their defence by Supreme Grand Master Azrael, who will see the servants of the Dark Gods driven from the Rock no matter the cost.

As battle rages and the fight grows ever more desperate, little do invaders or defenders suspect that a third power moves in the shadows, preparing to strike...

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